

NCPA  
Quarterly Journal  
Vol. XIII, No. 2, June 1984





*N. Ramaswamy*

Sponsors:

National Centre for the Performing Arts  
Max Mueller Bhavan

Co-Sponsors:

Alliance Française  
British Council  
Indian Council for Cultural Relations  
Sangeet Natak Akademi

# *East* DANCE ENCOUNTER *West*

22nd – 29th January 1984  
At the National Centre for the  
Performing Arts, Bombay

# NATIONAL CENTRE FOR THE PERFORMING ARTS

Quarterly Journal

Volume XIII

Number 2

June 1984

## East-West Dance Encounter (Special Issue)

### CONTENTS

Organisers & Participants	1
Dance Encounter—Jamshed Bhabha & Georg Lechner	5
Closed Sessions—A Report	8
<i>Dear audience, cast the right net</i> —Georg Lechner	39
In Search of a Meeting-place of East and West through Dance— Uttara Asha Coorlawala	44
The Search is One—An Interview	52
Krishna or Godot?—Ileana Citaristi	56
Contemporary Relevance in Classical Dance—A Personal Note— Chandralekha	60
The Other Side—B. Malchow-Tayebi	65
Bala	72
News and Notes	80
Book Reviews	81
Evening Performances during the Encounter	86

The views expressed in the Quarterly Journal of the National Centre for the Performing Arts are those of the authors and do not necessarily conform to the views of the publishers. Permission to reproduce, in whole or part, any material published in this Journal must be obtained from The Editor, Quarterly Journal, National Centre for the Performing Arts, Nariman Point, Bombay 400 021.

Price: Rs. 10 India; £ 2.00 United Kingdom; \$ 5 U.S.A.



### Organisers

**Jamshed J. Bhabha**

Vice-Chairman and Trustee-in-Charge  
National Centre for the Performing Arts

**Georg Lechner**

Director  
Max Mueller Bhavan, Bombay

### Participants

(in alphabetical order)

**Dominique Bagouet** has been an associate of Maurice Béjart. His programmes "Suite pour violes" and "Sous la blafarde" have been acclaimed as unforgettable. Presently, he runs a school of dance at the House of Culture at Montpellier.

**Andréine Bel** has been a student of both western and eastern dance traditions. She does not claim to follow any "school of dance in particular, but rather to stand at the crosspoint of different traditions belonging to the western and eastern cultures", having pursued both traditions under masters like Francois Malkovsky, Pandit Birju Maharaj and others.

**Sucheta Bhide** was trained by Guru Parvatikumar in the theory and traditional practices of Bharata Natyam. She then launched on her own research on the Sanskrit, Hindi and Marathi compositions of the Maratha rulers of Tanjavur. She has carried out an exhaustive study of the dance compositions of King Shahaji.

**Gerhard Bohner** studied under Tatjana Gsovsky and Mary Wigman. He has danced with various dance companies in Mannheim, Frankfurt and Berlin, choreographed for the opera houses of several major cities in Germany, the Berlin Academy of Arts, the Folkwang Ballet and the Netherlands-Dans-Theatre. From 1978-81, he was co-director of the Bremen Ballet together with Reinhild Hoffmann. Since 1981 he has been working as freelance choreographer in Berlin.

**Patrizia Cerroni** has created a very personal body language, a style, a technique of moving and a way of seeing choreography in the theatre. She has been in constant contact with American modern dance and German dance. After many European experiences, she created the well-known dance group "I Danzatori Scalzi". The group has toured extensively in Europe and Asia.

**Chandralekha** is a firm believer in the need for resuscitating traditional arts with contemporary energy, and works towards demystification of dance. In her work *Navagraha*, she strips the traditional Bharata Natyam of nostalgic sentiments and replaces them with new values—a break from the past and a pointer towards an exploration of new directions.

**Ileena Citaristi** was doing her doctorate in Philosophy on 'Psycho-analysis and Eastern Mythology' when the passion to explore Oriental culture was sparked in her. Four and a half years ago, she began studying Odissi under Guru Kelucharan in Cuttack and is now also at home with the different postures of Chhau dance, which she has been learning for the last three years under Sri Hari Nayak in the Utkal Sangeet Mahavidyalaya of Bhubaneswar.

**Uttara Asha Coorlawala** graduated from Smith College, Massachusetts with a degree in dance and drama. While supervising the dance department at the Spence School, New York, she continued her professional studies at the schools of Martha Graham, Merce Cunningham and Alvin Ailey and danced with New York-based modern dance companies. Her solo program 'Uttara Dances' features traditional and contemporary Indian dances and reflects her fascination with the formal and the immediate experience.

**Astad Deboo** has had extensive training in Indian classical, Kathakali and modern dance. His training abroad has ranged from Martha Graham technique in London and Jazz classes in San Francisco with Dolorous Cayon to the Wuppertal Dance Company in Germany under Pina Bausch. In his modern dance performances, Astad has blended Indian dance elements with modern dance techniques.

**Carmen DeLavallade** began her formal dance education at a very young age under Lester Horton in Los Angeles. Soon a member of his company, she excelled in the role of Salome and here began her partnership with Alvin Ailey. She went on to perform in several Broadway productions, meeting her celebrated choreographer-producer husband, Geoffrey Holden of the Wiz in "The House of Flowers". She is especially known for her Come Sunday spirituals and "recreations of Ruth St. Denis' 'Incense' and 'Radha'.

**Anne Marie Gaston (Anjali)** spent a total of ten years in India, studying and performing four classical dances: Bharata Natyam, Kathakali, Kuchipudi and Odissi. Her recent book *Siva in Dance, Myth and Iconography* published by Oxford University Press has been widely acclaimed.

**Sunil Kothari**, Editor of *Sangeet Natak*, journal of the Sangeet Natak Akademi, is a well-known dance critic and scholar.

**Yamini Krishnamurti** was trained in Bharata Natyam under the guidance of Rukmini Devi at Kalakshetra. She has been unanimously acclaimed to have set truly high standards for all aspects of Bharata Natyam. Using free technique and breaking away from the traditional pattern, Yamini recently composed a Vedic Ballet, that she calls her endeavour at "visualizing" in dance what the rishis of yore "visioned". It was presented at the Encounter.

**Kumudini Lakhia**, a well-established name in the field of Kathak dance, is the director of Kadamba Akademi of Dance and Music in Ahmedabad. She is regarded as an innovative choreographer and her compositions on contemporary problems reveal an imaginative use of the Kathak idiom.

**Susanne Linke** completed a degree in dance at the Folkwang University, Essen and started her career with Folkwang Tanzstudio under the direction of Pina Bausch. During this period she also gained experience as a choreographer. Encouraged by the many awards for choreography, she founded her own professional dance group, the Folkwang Dance Studio. Since 1981, Susanne Linke has also been performing solo programs, using the flexibility of modern dance technique to create an atmosphere of structural clarity.

**Stephen Long** had his ballet training at the Royal Ballet School. He has been a member of the London Festival Ballet for four years and has played an important part in the development of its Education and Community Unit. He has worked in cooperation with the British Council and toured extensively in Brazil. His roles have included Petrouchka.

**Sharon Lowen** had her initial training in modern dance. Her involvement with Eastern dance traditions started with Manipuri more than ten years ago. Since then she has branched out into Chhau and Odissi dance forms also. Fellowships from the American Institute of Indian Studies gave her ample opportunities to spend a considerable length of time in India. She divides her time between India and the United States, keeping in touch with both the eastern and western traditions.

**Sonal Mansingh** received her training in Bharata Natyam from a number of gurus belonging to the Pandanallur school and, in Odissi, among others, under Guru Kelucharan. She has incorporated in her repertoire numbers like *Sita Swayamvaram* based on Tulsidas' *Ramcharitmanas* and *Magdalena Mariam*, a Malayalam composition of Poet Vallathol. She has gained wide recognition at home and abroad for her impeccable stylistic taste and is the founder of the Centre for Classical Indian Dance in New Delhi.

**Elisabeth Mauger** attended ballet classes at the Dance Academy of Amiens, France with Helena Varenova. After further ballet training under Raymond Franchetti, Youra Loboff, Paul Goube and Rosella Hightower, she began modern dance when she was twenty in New York where she took classes and choreography sessions with Merce Cunningham and members of his company for two years. Thereafter, she has been performing and teaching modern dance in France.

**Narayana Menon**, formerly Executive Director, National Centre for the Performing Arts, is Chairman of the Sangeet Natak Akademi in New Delhi. He is a scholar of international standing in the fields of music and dance.

**Avanthi Muralikrishna** has received training in Kuchipudi from Guru Vempati Chinna Sathyam and has performed regularly in India and abroad. She was invited to Germany in 1979 and again in 1981-82, where she conducted dance workshops and lecture-demonstrations.

**Ritha Devi** has the distinction of having studied seven Indian classical dance styles, namely Manipuri, Bharata Natyam, Kathakali, Mohiniattam, Kuchipudi, Odissi and Satriya Nritya. Since May '78, Ritha Devi has been choreographing sacred themes from the Bible, combining Indian dance techniques with western music, calling the

resultant style "Prakrateechi" (East-West). She now lives in New York and teaches dance at the New York University.

**Mallika Sarabhai** received her training in Bharata Natyam under the guidance of her mother, Mrinalini Sarabhai. In addition to her solo recitals, she has travelled extensively in India and abroad and performed with her mother in various dance dramas. She won a special award at the 15th International Dance Festival at the Theatre de Champs Elysées in Paris. Mallika holds a Master's degree in Management and has done a Ph.D in Psychology. She has also acted in many films.

**Mrinalini Sarabhai** has been one of the pioneers in the field of Indian dance and began her professional career as a partner of Ram Gopal. She is well-known as a choreographer of several dance dramas, both based on mythological themes and innovative work. She is the founder of the Darpana Academy of Performing Arts and author of *Understanding Bharata Natyam* and *Sacred Dances of India*.

**Bharat Sharma** has been trained in Mayurbhanj Chhau dance by his father, the choreographer Narendra Sharma. He is especially well-known for his performance, *The Wolfboy*. He studied at Jacob's Pillow Dance Festival and has recently received a grant from the Asian Cultural Council to study choreography at Alvin Nikolai's Space Lab. He will be performing at the American Dance College, Connecticut.

**Shanta Serbeet Singh** is a dance and film critic and a regular contributor to leading national newspapers.

**Chitra Sundaram** has had intensive training in Bharata Natyam from Gurus Venugopal Pillai, Nana Kasar, Kuppiah Pillai and Kalyanasundaram Pillai. Living until recently in London, she taught Bharata Natyam at the Academy of Indian Dance at the Commonwealth Institute, the Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan, the Laban Centre (Goldsmith's College) and at the University of Sussex in Brighton. She has conducted dance workshops and lecture demonstrations and collaborated with Corinne Bougaard of the Extemporary Dance Theatre.

**Shirin Vajifdar** is a well-known dance critic.

**Igor Wakhévitch** is a composer and has been a student of the French master composer Oliver Messiaen in the Paris Conservatory of Music. He has worked for many big festivals creating music for dance choreographers of such standing as Carolyn Carlson and Rina Scheufeld and trained in dance-theatre with Maurice Béjart in Brussels. Now living in Auroville International Township, he composed a new piece of music for the Encounter and co-authored a choreography with Uttara Coorlawala.

## Dance Encounter

### The Indian Scene

This century has borne witness to two very diverse developments in the realm of dance, in the context of Europe followed by America, on one hand, and India on the other.

In India, dance as codified in the *Natya Shastra* has been—together with music—an integral part of the theatre tradition—a tradition which harks back to the time of the Vedas. Indian tradition has always associated the deepest philosophical and religious connotations with dance. To express it differently: In India Christ was a dancer. Fritjof Capra analyses in detail in his book 'The Tao of Physics', published in 1975, how the latest discoveries of Physics in the subatomic realm find an echo in the concept of Shiva-Nataraj. "For the modern physicists, then, Shiva's dance is the dance of subatomic matter. As in Hindu mythology, it is a continual dance of creation and destruction involving the whole cosmos; the basis of all existence and of all natural phenomena. Hundreds of years ago, Indian artists created visual images of dancing Shivas in beautiful series of bronzes. In our time physicists have used the most advanced technology to portray the patterns of the cosmic dance. The bubble-chamber photographs of interacting particles, which bear testimony to the continual rhythm of creation and destruction in the universe, are visual images of the dance of Shiva equalling those of the Indian artists in beauty and profound significance. The metaphor of the cosmic dance thus unifies ancient mythology, religious art and modern physics. It is indeed, as Coomaraswamy has said, 'poetry, but none the less science.'"

Indian classical dance suffered a setback as a result of British colonialism. The temple dances, the forerunners of today's classical Indian dance, were forbidden by law till well into the 30's by the 'Devadasi Act'. The revival of the ancient dance tradition, however, soon became part of the new process of cultural identity, which in the post-independence period brought about the renaissance of Indian classical dance, lasting up to the present day. Ram Gopal, Rukminidevi, Balasaraswati, Shambhu Maharaj were the pioneers in this task. Comparisons with classical music can be drawn here, too. If the dancers of the first generation belonging to this period perceived their art exclusively as an authentic projection of the traditional dance school, a certain openness to innovations, no doubt an inevitable result of the constant contact with the West, is discernible among the dancers of the present generation.

Such attempts at innovations, cautious and tentative as they are, are conceivable for many only within the precincts of the traditional form, to the extent of redeeming from oblivion earlier, forgotten and distorted dance elements; only very few venture forth into the realm of dialogue between eastern and western dance forms. Dancers like Mrinalini Sarabhai, Padma Subramaniam and Chandralekha would be examples for the first group; Kumudini Lakhia, Ritha Devi, Uttara Asha Coorlawala and Astad Deboo for the latter.

An exponent of the traditional dance, Uday Shankar was still drawn to the modern western dance. The inspiration he gained from his European tours found form and substance in a regular dance troupe (that has branches in Delhi



and Calcutta even today) and were reflected in the film *Kalpana*. Modern western dance à la Uday Shankar, however, has not taken root in India till today because of the well-entrenched, indigenous dance tradition. In future too, Indian dance will essentially mean an authentic projection of its traditional dance styles. It will at the same time, not only be open to innovations but also further develop the dialogue forms that are as yet incipient. The western influence on Indian classical dance, minimal as it may be, is generally underestimated, but this influence concerns, at a more fundamental level, the concept of secularisation and, at a more surface level, the stage presentation of the dances.

#### *The western scene*

Since the turn of the century, dance in the west has undergone a revolutionary change, whose essential goal has been to free itself from rigid conventionalism and to achieve a personalised and individualised experience, gained through the whole gamut of body language. This development, which needs no elaboration here, is linked closely with names like Isadora Duncan, Michel Fokine, Nijinsky, Mary Wigman, Harald Kreutzberg, Doris Humphrey, Rudolf von Laban, Martha Graham, José Limon, Merce Cunningham, George Balanchine, Paul Taylor, Murray Louis, Robert Joffrey, Glen Tetley, John Cranko, Maurice Béjart, Van Manen and Pina Bausch. The long trail from the free dance of Isadora Duncan to today's post-modern dance led time and again to the fringes of expressional ability of the body and attempted on one side to leap over the boundaries of dance into theatre à la Pina Bausch or to orient itself to non-European dance. This was true for Pavlova and Martha Graham as also later for the Jazz dance or Maurice Béjart and Mudra International. This development in western dance signified at the same time a disassociation from the religious moorings, which for Indian dance are so important even today. The German critics reacted with bewilderment to John Neumeier's statement, often quoted on the production of *St. Mathew's Passion*: "I am a Christian and I am a dancer". Is it an accident that Martha Graham's production in 1982 was entitled 'Palace of Gods' and had references to India?

Hardly any other western choreographer has probed the realm of Asian dance forms as thoroughly and intensively as Maurice Béjart in his work on *Tibetan Book of Death* and in *Bhakti*, a work conceived close in spirit to Indian dance. His definition of a 'total actor' as being one who learns to express himself through voice, gestures and movement of his whole body, strikes a chord close to Indian concepts: "A pure dancer is only a synthetic product, he remains boring." Béjart's considered and balanced views on the question of cultural dialogue are worthy of reflection.

"I therefore believe that it is indeed very important for our world today to let two currents, two movements forge ahead: one, that our world is one great unity and the other séparatist movement through which we have to emphasise the unique value of the individuality of the human being—expressed through his language and other elements that build his heritage and culture. To maintain a balance between these two currents is, I believe, the most important task of our time." (*Ballet International*, No. 6/7, June/July '82).

The fact that western ballet and dance journals like the *Ballet International* publish serious contributions on the subject of dialogue attempts between western

and eastern dances all too rarely is evidence of a general lack of interest. In the conviction that the future will not continue to endorse this attitude, a set of questions, addressed to contemporary dance is offered here by way of further description of the western dance. (A similar questionnaire is, of course, easy enough to draw up for Indian classical dance as well).

- 1) Is a dancer above 30 not to be trusted anymore?
- 2) Why is the incidence of injuries so high among western dancers?
- 3) Is improvisation possible for dancers performing to taped music?
- 4) Barring a few exceptions such as *The Green Table*, why are there only a few 'evergreens' or classics in modern dance?
- 5) Were the great solo performances à la Isadora Duncan, Martha Graham, Mary Wigman, Harald Kreutzberg primarily a phenomenon of personalities or a time-bound phenomenon or both in equal measure? What is the relevance of the answer for today?
- 6) What is the basis of the predominance of the Russians in classical ballet and the Americans in contemporary dance?
- 7) The classical ballet is the cultural expression of European renaissance with the stamp of France and Italy; Indian or Japanese, African or Brazilian dance forms carry their unique unmistakable cultural identity: on what cultural common ground, rests the internationality of the contemporary dance?
- 8) Why does the line of demarcation between the body language of high-skill gymnastic sports and contemporary dance often seem so fluid?
- 9) There are dance traditions that make it obligatory for their dancers to gain an exact knowledge and deep experience of their culture, i.e. their literature, music and art. What cultural baggage does a contemporary twenty-year-old dancer of an internationally-flavoured group carry along?
- 10) The cultural differences between the Chinese and the Africans, the Asians and the Europeans, the Arabs and the South Americans run deep even today and manifest themselves in many ways, down to everyday body-gestures: where do they find a place in international contemporary dance?

#### *Aims*

The proposed Dance Encounter will not declaim—either extolling or condemning—pre-conceived opinions on East-West synthesis, but try to create a forum for a meeting of minds and exchange of information, where the respective artistic basic concepts, dance styles and work modes as pertaining to India and the West will be analysed in depth. Dance, like music, is replete with examples of how influences from other cultures were and still are artistically recreated and assimilated in many different ways. Graham and Béjart, Messiaen, Cage and Stockhausen, Uday Shankar and Ravi Shankar or also Lin Hwai-Min and his Cloud-Gate theatre or Rey Philips of Mudra International are but a few among many other names and initiatives.

To sum up: Inspiration not through theoretical but practical information that could place the revised adage "Cuius regio eius ars" in a new context. At the focal point of this inquiry may well be aggression, melancholy and experiment on the side of modern western dance; stagnation, authenticity and intuition on the side of Indian dance.

Jamshed J. Bhabha

Georg Lechner

# East DANCE ENCOUNTER West

## Closed Sessions



Georg Lechner, Jamshed Bhabha and Mrinalini Sarabhai  
(Photo: Pankaj Shah)

Monday, January 23.

The first working session of the East-West Dance Encounter opened with a few introductory remarks by Jamshed Bhabha, Vice-Chairman and Trustee-in-Charge of the National Centre for the Performing Arts.

"This is the first time a dialogue of this kind is being attempted. In dance, the mode of expression is dance itself and not the typescript or the papers in front of you. I hope the Encounter will be purposeful in terms of drawing some conclusions: what is worth experimenting with and what it is a mistake to pursue... At the end of it all, there should be something which makes you feel it was a worthwhile exercise... in terms of what to avoid, what not to waste time on and what to achieve."

Dr. Georg Lechner, Director of the Max Mueller Bhavan, Bombay, said:

"Stock-taking from time to time is a good and healthy exercise for dancers too... Does Indian dance feel the need for developing choreography to express new themes? Is it meaningful in the Indian context? Is it being done professionally or is it just an imitative process? What does it mean to be open to new cultures, or stepping out of one's culture into another? While politeness is the most beautiful thing in life at all stages and for all occasions, honesty, I think, is even more important. And, you have it in your state symbol that truth will finally prevail... Let this be the motto for your discussions. There's so much to say..."

Then Mrinalini Sarabhai addressed the gathering: "Dance encounters are personal. My entire life was a search for what I thought was beautiful in Bharata Natyam. There are many varieties of Bharata Natyam. I liked the strong style of Pandanallur... Traditional training was necessary for my body to express that I belong to this country... We have been rediscovering it rather than finding something new. In my childhood, very little was known about Bharata Natyam and the only dance people seemed to know about was tap dancing and cabaret. At my insistence, my mother took me to Rukminidevi and one of the gurus at Kalakshetra taught me. Right from the beginning, old forms, ancient manuscripts and objects interested me and I began a lifelong process of research in them. The Kathakali form fascinated me and I began to learn it as part of the process of finding myself. I was a dancer, but I was also an experimenter. It was not enough for me to be just a *devadasi*, a handmaiden of God: I needed something more because I lived in a century which disturbed me... Dance is not a static concept—it is always changing. At the Delhi seminar on Kathakali in 1949, many people attacked the pure form and suggested its rejection. To bring into focus the richness and inherent strength of the form, I presented *Manushya*, a dance-drama in the Kathakali style but without the use of its traditional costumes and masks.

"I feel that the opportunity to be exposed to another culture and to absorb from one another leads to more meaningful encounters than the mode of making Europeans and other non-Indians learn Bharata Natyam, Kathakali, etc. I recall a *pas de deux* in Indian style which I danced for Miskovich from the Paris Opera. Later, I had my first real 'encounter' while dancing with western dancers during a six-month tour of Rome, Milan, Venice and other cities. It was a production in which the dancers experience self-awareness for the first time as they see a 'film' accidentally mixing up footage of the lyrical Sylphide and the holocaust of nuclear wars, Vietnam *et al.* In this ballet, I came in as the spirit of the East and helped the dancers in their introspective journey.

"A second encounter of this kind came when Schubert's long-lost score of *Shakuntala* was given to me by a friend. Our troupe performed it in Gujarati. We couldn't find any recognizable beat in Schubert and we are so used to rhythm of this kind in Indian dance. To put Indian dance to Schubert was really something... I love challenges and the idea was



Mrinalini Sarabhai  
(Photo: Pankaj Shah)

really interesting. In 1954 my presentation *Maya and the Disciple* was premiered in Germany. In it, I used, for the first time, Tantric philosophy, motifs, images and colours.

"An encounter which left a great impact on me was a seminar held recently for Third World performing artistes. Listening to the African drums and watching the rhythms of their dance, I felt a closeness, a sadness I could share with them.

"Dancers are travelling all the time, but they never have the privilege of an encounter of the kind we are having now. You perform and you go, rarely having the opportunity to talk to other dancers or the public about your work or about dance in general."

"How do you react to words?" Mrinalini was asked.

"When I hear a poem or read something, I start to dance. . . I am not a choreographer in the true sense of the word, I am an experimenter. . . the whole world touches me at different spots and I go out and dance. The Indian dancer has a great burden to bear when she sets a path for herself outside the strict confines of tradition. We make every bit of our own music. I have to create my own words—which is a tremendous task that Indian dancers have to undertake. . . Musicians here, I am

sorry to say, do not create for dance. . . I have beautiful pieces. I am not a musician, but I have to create everything myself—the costumes, the music, stage sets, even the words."

. . .

Yamini Krishnamurti, who had performed at the Tata Theatre the previous evening, spoke next. She had presented, along with her students, a ballet based on seven hymns of the Rigveda. "Why the Vedas?" many wondered. Yamini explained:

"I wanted to do a ballet. What fascinated me were the Vedic hymns. My father was a Vedic scholar and in my growing years I heard *pandit-s* reciting them in the house. You get jaded with *jatiswaram-s*, *varnam-s* etc. . . This has been a good experience for me as a dancer. . . to get out of this rut."

A number of participants and observers questioned the aesthetic validity of the experiment and wondered whether the ballet had, in the process of "breaking away", really achieved what it set out to. Pointing to the casual costumes and the casual manner in which her students came on the stage, Sunil Kothari said, "There was no organised movement as should be evident in rigorous Bharata Natyam training." Yamini replied, "This was exactly what I wanted to break away



Yamini Krishnamurti and her students in the Vedic Ballet  
(Photo: Palasranjan Bhaumick)



from. My experiments in costumes were, at this stage, not very important for me." Carmen DeLavallade remarked, "If one wants to break away, one must have experienced people to break away with. Unlike young people who have yet to understand their own bodies and selves, mature dancers have the experience and ability to absorb quickly what is required of them. Maybe, if you had done the same thing with experienced dancers...?"

"I want to be free" replied Yamini.

Chandralekha added another dimension to the lively debate: "We don't have to have sentiment, narrative, plot etc. as a crutch... I think dance has to stand on its own. A Rigvedic hymn—we cannot hold on to all this as if we would drown without it... A time has come when we have to ask these questions: What is Time? What is Space? What is Material? What are our directions?"

Dr. Lechner invited those present to consider these vital and pertinent questions. Jamshed Bhabha expressed his reactions:

"If we analyse the components of our dance forms, is it possible that they do not lend themselves to the kind of group dancing to which Western dancing lends itself because you form patterns (as in *The Swan Lake* ballet)? Nothing is gained and something is lost if six dancers do identical movements... because they are not contributing anything new... This had nothing to do with the dancers' level. For if in place of one Yamini we had seven Yaminis and all seven were equally good, instead of being an addition it would be a distraction. If one were to see a replication of her image, it would not necessarily be aesthetically more valid than the solo impact."

Kumudini Lakhia added:

"Indian dancers do not really understand what choreography is. We become imitators because we are not trained or exposed to what, in the West, is understood as choreography. Most Indian dancers go in for the narrative element... so the dance gets lost and the dancer even more so because it becomes secondary... It is the dance which is important as in Susanne's performance yesterday, where we hardly saw the dancer... Indian philosophy says look inwards, whereas, today, Indian dancers are looking outwards to see who is in the audience..."

A number of speakers intervened to ask Yamini why she had used the group and whether she could have as well expressed her concept alone as with a group. Sharon Lowen, the American dancer, questioned the use of traditional Indian forms in ballet. "The question," she said "comes when a person steps out of his tradition or his training." Georg Lechner pointed out:

"The history of the growth of ballet in the West had been so complex and had resulted in so heavy an apparatus, in terms of financing, organizational work etc., that it would be well for everyone to ponder over what it is that is being sought to be achieved with the introduction of 'ballet' into Indian dance. The first step might be to meet, deliberate

deeply, giving one another time to reflect on all sides of the issue before deciding what is right and what wrong."

Chandralekha pleaded for a change of heart and mind. "I think we are at a stage of history where the West was earlier... our art is becoming mummified, fossilized. Where do we go from here? The danger is of being mechanised. There is a way out, a radical way, the way of a dialogue between dancers, visualizers, performers *et al.* Arrogance and insularity are archaic; reactionary concepts must be shed before new forms can evolve. Talk of perfectionism, infallibility must end and also the conspicuous quantitative notion in the dance scene as opposed to the qualitative. Choreography is very subtle in our Indian tradition... When you see Bharata Natyam... I see levels. From the floor to the entire *mandala*, there are levels in our choreography, but are we looking? Are we listening to our tradition? Let us look at the body levels in classical dance, at Time, at *tala* and Space as concepts that do not bind us but instead liberate us."

Jamshed Bhabha clarified:

"We are not saying that the old traditions should be relegated. Side by side is the evolution of new experiences; this is what this whole gathering should address itself to."

Andreine Bel elaborated the group concept:

"Yamini had the idea of a chorus as in Greek drama, not of ballet choreography. But there, the chorus was kept behind the main actors, whereas here the chorus kept coming in front."

Stephen Long added:

"The technique of dancing in a group is quite different from dancing solo. There isn't this training here to learn to dance together."

Kumudini Lakhia reiterated, "We do not have that discipline (as in Western ballet) in our training."

Carmen DeLavallade said, "We're continually breaking form... maybe it's looking into certain forms and reforming what you have... you have to take a chance to crack it."

Sharon Lowen added:

"For ballet you *must* have trained people. Ballet, in India, has a bad name—you see poorly-trained dancers; well-trained dancers are unwilling to work with choreographers."

Someone remarked that things would be different if we had a choreographer like Balanchine because "the problem is that all Indian dancers are choreographers." Jamshed Bhabha remarked that one must also consider the question of what lent itself to group presentation and what was suitable only for solo.

The session ended on a provocative note with Dashrath Patel's queries:

"Does the Indian psyche lend itself to group presentation? In every field of endeavour the aim is individual excellence, never group brilliance. If dancers in India can learn to share their experiences and to work together that's the greatest contribution Indian dancers can make to life in India."



*Dominique Bagouet (Photo: Pankaj Shah)*

Dominique Bagouet spoke and demonstrated his style of modern dance.

"The pressure of contrasting influences from the East and West is very much like the meat in a hamburger. I began with formal training in ballet, and exposure to French tradition with its classical values. After the fermentations set in by the war, I watched the many American dance companies that visited France and became acquainted with the work of Maurice Béjart who popularised the concept of art for the masses. Then came the impact of the intensity and spirituality of the German way of being on stage, some exposure to Japanese aesthetics and then to a bit of Bharata Natyam, picked up from a French dancer who had been in Madras for many years. Together we did a creative dance piece. My journey to modern dance, starting from a point of antipathy, took the route of finding myself in the companies of the well-known George Balanchine (when he was working in Europe in 1969) and later with the Maurice Béjart company in Brussels where I was frequently called upon to enact the role of the clown, something I did very well. When I left Béjart after two years, I joined a group called "Chandra" run by a student of Béjart, Carolyn Carlson. Like Béjart himself, she was heavily influenced by Indian dance. I toured America with the company for nine months while continuing to take classes with Carolyn. Back in France, I entered a choreography competition, received the first prize and was launched into my new career as a choreographer. For the last five years I have been in Montpellier, heading a school of dance run by the civic body, and although I have excellent facilities for my work, there is the problem of being away from the TV and media-centers in Paris and the consequent danger of being forgotten."

Dominique was asked about Béjart's influence on him and on dance. Sunil Kothari wanted to know whether creative people felt that Béjart was stuck. "No person is stuck unless he wants to be stuck. . . Béjart has something to say; he is very poetic, but I don't like the way he says it." Of himself, Dominique felt—"I think I choreograph better if I understand people better. . ."

---

*Tuesday, January 24.*

Uttara Asha Coorlawala began with an exposition of her work. "My whole training has been 'an encounter', beginning with a scholarship to the Graham School of Dance and ending with my training in Bharata Natyam during my tenure as a Homi Bhabha Fellow. Martha Graham's advice to me was: 'You will never be like a New York dancer, you will never be an American dancer, you do not have the attack. . .because you are different, you have your own culture and your own quality and you must learn to be you.' From a study of both Indian and Western dance styles and philosophies, I have found many areas of similarity. In dance, what matters is efficiency of movement, not style. Indian dance is earth-bound, modern dance, Western dance is airborne. Seeing village dancers

in Purulia doing fantastic back flips, cartwheels, leaps and jumps in the Chhau style, in the heat of April and with heavy masks, I tried to resolve, for myself, the all-important question of where the source of such incredible energy came. I found a course in *Hatha yoga* particularly useful in 'unblocking' different parts of the body and in creating the free flow of movement which is the ideal and optimum state. In the analytical approach to movement, Laban's work inspired and helped me."

Igor Wakhévitch, who has composed the music for Uttara's formal presentation, spoke of his life at Auroville, where he lives permanently now.

"I began musical studies when I was eight and continued at the Paris Conservatory and at home with my father. His work in stage and theatre design drew to our house luminaries of the intellectual and creative world like Jean Cocteau and Galina Ulanova. My discovery of dance and electronic music proved decisive influences on my work as did my meeting with Maurice Béjart. After my first visit in 1973 to Pondicherry, when I had the privilege of an unexpected 'darshan' of Ma, I have come back regularly for a few months every year. I continued my work of composing, (for instance, for Carolyn Carlson's troupe for whom I did seven big ballets). But I now live permanently in Auroville. I feel that the West has a lot to learn from India, more than you have to from us. When I watch dancers I feel inside me each of their movements—even their more microscopic movements. That, for me, is a new language, a universal language. And I'm sure that we don't know really the link between western culture and eastern culture. I am sure there are some inter-relationships more deep than we suppose. It is an illusion to believe that there is duality. We are the same. For myself, I discovered that we are part of the universe, nay, we *are* the universe."

Susanne Linke moved her audience with her journey back into time to explain why she found speech difficult.

"It is very difficult for me to speak in front, on stage, to people with words . . . I feel that is the reason why I am dancing, because I cannot speak. I couldn't hear and speak the first few years of my life . . . When I was born, I had meningitis . . . So, as a baby, I couldn't learn quickly, I couldn't walk and everything went slow. I started to speak when I was six years old with a special education. So speech is not my language, it doesn't matter whether in English, French or German . . . I like to talk but I just cannot . . . The only way for me to express myself was with the body . . . When I moved my lips the way I saw others doing, there was no response and the only time people responded was when I spoke with my body. They would only react when I was playing with my body . . . I think that's the reason maybe why I am dancing. I got language after great torture . . . but it is not my home . . . my home is the body with which I have done everything."

She spoke about her early years, during the war, when the family was too poor to send her to ballet school.



Susanne Linke (Photo Palasranjan Bhauwick)

"I think what dance is for me is not movement . . . I think it's something different . . . it *is* movement of course, but it can also be only vibrations . . . it has something to do with the spiritual. Dance is everything, but life is also everything . . . it is also pain . . . and it is important that we know what it is, so that we also know what it is in dance . . . That is what we have to aim for. I am trying to show a little of the possibility of showing in dance the Soul and that's very difficult. What is the Soul? . . . I think the Soul can be everything but it is very difficult to catch it. I do not know whether we can show it and, for me, that's the aim . . ."

Susanne sought to explain the use of music in her solo pieces.

"For me, I try not to run behind the music. You have to be exact . . . Music can be used as an atmosphere, as a partner, correspondence . . . I also like to play with music . . . it also looks like I push the music, that I give the cue and then the music comes . . . it makes things more rich . . ."

Susanne explained that in Europe they were not used to working on rhythm. Rather, they worked on melodies.

"In creating, we have to break something also . . . to break something for something, to say something new; that's why we have to break and not just to break . . . If you break just to break, the Soul is not there."



Carmen DeLavallade (Photo: Pankaj Shah)

In the afternoon session, Carmen DeLavallade spoke about herself and her dance. She recalled that though she came from an artistic family with at least one cousin actively on the stage, the pursuit of dance was not considered desirable for genteel people, even in the United States of the forties.

"Something in me wanted to dance. I never could stand still . . . I started learning formally at the age of fourteen from Lester Horton who taught me everything I value most, in particular the link between dance and a given image. He worked mainly from imagery . . . we would work this way without knowing we were working. His love of people, his ability to take from other cultures without destroying their essence and without turning them into some kind of insult communicated itself to me. Indian dancing is very rhythmical. We do phrasing. Jazz musicians counterpoint each other. They are conversationalists. I find that music makes very good conversation. I feel that movement has reason to be movement and it flows naturally from images drawn from nature, from art or from everyday life. Most of my life has been spent as a tool for other people . . . things were done for me or I had to interpret other people's work. This called for a high degree of courage from the so-called 'tool' because he or she was now the sole repository of the creator's intent. I have worked with most of the past greats like Ted Shawn and Ruth St. Denis and the best-known of today's dancers in America such as Alvin Ailey. I feel sad that dance in America today has become a kind of 'break-your-leg' choreography. The dancers are the most beautiful imaginable and have perfect technique. They are able to do incredible things. But, in the process, they seem to have lost contact with human beings. If you really know your craft and love your work, it will never look banal. You can always move people."

Bharat Sharma spoke about his early training with his father, Narendra Sharma, and the latter's work with Uday Shankar at Almora in the years 1939-42. Now, he assists his father in training others in the same creative style, (based on "understanding the potentials of each unit, shoulder, arm . . .") such as the famous Uday Shankar hand-and-arm movement, which he demonstrated.

"Even though I began to train in some Indian styles, such as Chhau and Kathakali, I found my moorings outside the classical framework and more into the kind of free movement offered by Western-style modern dance. I wonder if, within the Indian ethos, there can be mechanics or a principle which can be developed to discover a different form on your own?"

At the same time the freedom given to the class by Narendra Sharma to improvise and create prepared him for the intensive exposure he received in American dance centres from 1979 onwards, following a scholarship to study dance at Jacob's Pillow at Massachusetts and later the Asian Cultural Council's grant. This enabled him to study with Hanya Holm, Alwin Nikolais and Murray Louis. Since his return he has been busy choreographing his own solo pieces.

Wednesday, January 25.

Astad Deboo spoke of his experiences as a dancer. "In keeping up with the frantic pace, so typical of a lone performer's life, I had concentrated more on the *doing* rather than on *why* I was doing *what* I was doing. Preparing for this encounter gave me the opportunity to put aside everything, the hustle and bustle of preparing shows, organising performances, planning tours and all the *mundane* things which keep one from serious introspection. I could think back on my work."

Astad traced his training background, from Kathak in 1956 to a stint of modern dance in London at the School of Contemporary Dance and, back in India, Kathakali, which he still studies with his guru, E. Krishna Pannicker. More recently, he worked with Pina Bausch, the Wuppertal Dance Theatre and the American modern dance company, Pilobolus.

"Watching the Murray Louis Dance group, while I was still an undergraduate, set me thinking about the respective areas of Indian and Western dance traditions. I was attracted by the immediacy, freedom of form and flow of the group's dance and felt an urge to relate to the immediate environment, to what was contemporary thematically. Since then, I have tried to use, intuitively rather than cerebrally, the elements of my dance training, such as the dramatic essence of the Kathakali style. By its use of the face and *abhinaya*, it adds another dimension to modern dance's excessive stress on the body. Since I do not belong to any particular 'school' or style of modern dance, I am forced to look for an individual style from the varied influences on me. The choice of modern dance as dance material, is for me the outcome of my need to express contemporary issues, themes, concerns. The fact that I have to choreograph for a solo





Astad Deboo (Photo: Pankaj Shah)

dancer, determines the form, alters the nature of compositions. The Indian conditioning in dance does not favour male dancers. I hope to work against that conditioning by including male dancers in my future work. For instance, Rohinton Cama, the Bharata Natyam dancer. I am trying to find my own style . . . to put my own signature to modern dance."

The ensuing discussion flowed from Dr. Lechner's query: Did Indian dance feel the compulsions of our times—specifically those flowing out from the unique world situation created by the first nuclear explosion on August 6, 1945—such as had changed the nature of Western dance so totally? "What happens if you take movements from an established classical style (say Kathakali) and graft it onto a piece like *Bolero*?" Dr. Lechner wanted to know.

Susanne Linke replied:

"You can do everything—everything. It is only that you want to break something for some reason but, actually, it is absolutely free—only, it has to be stripped into forms. It is not that free."

Dr. Lechner said that if this grafting is acceptable, "then we have a whole gamut of new language." Pointing to the difference between a graft and blend, Sunil Kothari said that "with artistic logic, the graft disappears". Jamshed Bhabha

wondered why *abhinaya* could not be as expressive (as in Indian classical dance) when used with Western music. Dr. Lechner replied "Bharata Natyam or Odissi have not been invented as a language, as a dance idiom to express the horror of the holocaust", and wondered why.

Chandralekha said:

"Bharata and Abhinavagupta also have rules which are psychological rules. We have to think about these rules which talk about centering . . . Centering is even more important for us. From where do we begin and where do we go? I think this is a very important question in dance. Without that centering there can be no shape, no structure, no form. I believe in aesthetic unity. How do we achieve aesthetic integrity in what we are doing? We cannot express the holocaust unless we take the first step out of the rigid Bharata Natyam form . . . it's like a prison."

Mrinalini Sarabhai disagreed with Chandralekha's last statement about Bharata Natyam. "I don't feel it is a cage at all." Mallika Sarabhai remarked, "Any classical dance is a language and the limits you set to it are the limits of your own mind."

Dashrath Patel, painter and photographer, raised some valid queries.

"Can you dance to silence, to colour? Can you dance to a total vacuum? Or, can you have music and dance as a complement to each other and not as plugs in a socket . . .? Do you see that other arts can be useful for your change or inspiration?"

. . . .

The role of the artiste in society was taken up by Sonal Mansingh in her exposition. She spoke about her experience during a recent tour of war-ravaged Kampuchea where half the population had been decimated by its own race.

"At the great temple of Angkor Wat, my troupe and I watched a dance recital by the students of the local dance school. Out of the 100 dance teachers only three are alive and all the eighty pupils are orphans. But when they danced in tattered clothes, it seemed that out of that terrible experience was born serenity and the search and need for an inner peace, an inner calm and a certain bliss. They did not dance the dance of death, but of their own arrival at serenity. Like everyone else, the dancer, too, sees the holocausts that surround her at each step. But it is more important to transform the experience and transmute it into beauty and joy for the audience rather than make them relive their daily frustrations."

This sparked off a lively debate. Shanta Serbjeet Singh cautioned against taking an idea like the nuclear holocaust too literally. She said that one must

go beyond it for the spirit of oneness which the world must experience if it has to survive. When Kumudini Lakhia asked her about the dancer's responsibility towards society, Sonal replied:

"The responsibility to remind people that there are dilemmas in life is not mine. My responsibility to society is... to create a pool of light, of vibrations, which uplifts them for the time that they see me dance."



Sonal Mansingh  
(Photo: Pankaj Shah)

Jamshed Bhabha said that there was one basic principle underlying all art forms—an intensification of the life-force in performer and audience. Dr. Lechner's comment was that intensification of the life-force meant that sometimes you have to strip yourself. Ileana Citaristi remarked, "In India, it is still mythology which works."

Sonal said,

"Dance for me has been like eating, sleeping, drinking etc... I would not call it a search. I do not even know what I am searching for... not yet. Classical dance is free, fluid. If you find your own centre, then nothing is rigid. If I choose to dance in this particular idiom, it is because I want to, because I like it, because it enriches me, because it fulfils my need for beauty and harmony..."

Is Sonal's approach to dance still valid in today's changed world situation? Can the aesthetic response still communicate and share the pain of the world without necessarily becoming a dark world view? The discussion hinged round this point.

Sharon Lowen began her presentation.

"There are so many aspects to this East-West Encounter. I trained in ballet and modern dance but was exposed to many dance forms. After completing my Masters in Dance in the States, I came to India on a Fulbright Scholarship and started learning Manipuri. Later, I took classes in Chhau. Its wide stance and free movement came as a great relief after Manipuri and Odissi, of course, was pure pleasure."

Sharon then demonstrated a creative piece in traditional Manipuri and spoke about the formal possibilities for modern choreography.

"Mine is a North-South Encounter", began Sucheta Bhide, referring to her synthesis of Bharata Natyam with Hindustani music and rhythms.

"I am not trying to replace anything... just trying to expand the horizons, to add new dimensions to this technique which I love so much. My main objective is to bring Bharata Natyam closer to audiences in North India.

She spoke of the Tanjavur dance tradition and the research initiated in this field by Guru Parvatikumar, the signposts along the way being the Marathi and Hindi compositions for Bharata Natyam by the Maratha rulers of Tanjavur (Sarfoji Maharaj and Shahaji). She wondered why a classical dance tradition indigenous to Maharashtra was absent when sculptural evidence all over the Deccan indicated a rich dance tradition, based on the *Natya Shastra*, upto the Yadava period or at least prior to the Mughal invasions. A perfect synthesis of Hindustani music



Sucheta Bhide (Photo: Pankaj Shah)

and Bharata Natyam technique, she felt, might one day lead to the creation of a mode for Maharashtra in the same way as Odissi, Kuchipudi and Mohini Attam are for their respective areas.

Sucheta spoke about the two rules she tried to follow in her experiment.

"I wish to keep intact, on the one hand, the true spirit of the Bharata Natyam technique, its capacity to build a perfect synthesis of curved and angular lines, of the body's total movement of *Anga*, *Pratyanga* and *Upanga*. At the same time, I do not want the rhythm patterns of Hindustani

music and its *tala*-s to lose their own identity in the course of being moulded to Bharata Natyam technique. Just as the answer cannot be a *Varnam*, composed in a North Indian *Raga* (since the *Varnam* is essentially a Carnatic composition), so a typical *Khayal* will not do because its development is different and it is primarily meant to be sung. Just as there are *Tana Varnam*-s (mainly to be sung) and *Pada Varnam*-s (mainly to be danced), so also there could be a *Khayal* to be danced. I devised a recital along the lines of *Mangala Shloka*-s for the overture; *Peshkar*, a parallel composition for *Alarippu*; *Sargam* for *Jathiswaram*; then a *Khayal* in *Vilambit* and *Drut* or a *Dhrupad-Dhamar*, followed by a *Bhajan*, a *Thumri* or a *Natyageet* equivalent to a *Padam* or a *Javali*. I feel I am now ready to present this experiment."

Avanthi spoke next. She discussed her problem of the rational mind seeking a 'logic' instead of the 'faith' that tradition, culture and education had imposed on her mind. When she was nineteen, she went to Germany to perform. There she felt the need for looking beyond the symbols of dance so as to make them more understandable and logically acceptable to other cultures without 'footnoting'. More and more she found herself alienated from the myths and the 'jungle' of tradition which she was called upon to interpret on stage. She admitted that she wanted to retain the aesthetic beauty of the form but without its content which is no longer applicable in today's context. She said,

"The symbol is coming in the way of communication. I want to demystify this and make it human. I have the moral responsibility to communicate the essence of what I am doing. Dance has a value beyond mere awareness and a relevance to the new intellectual issues of today. How can one go about this aim? The first step could be to realise that you dance the way you live and that artistic expression cannot be divorced from the real person that is you."

Thursday, January 26.

Gerhard Bohner spoke about himself and his work. "It is not important to play around with too many ideas but to use simple concepts and with very economical movements. I reacted against the excessive movement-orientation of contemporary western dance and have gone back to a point where there is perhaps no music, very simple steps which could give the dancer a chance to create something, and the simplest props. I like very much to go into a corner."

He demonstrated a number of pieces relying on his body resources.

Bohner remarked that it was very important for ballet to change its theme. Taking the cue, many of the participants spoke about the dancer's responsibility to react to the times. Every era, every time, it was felt, must have its



Gerhard Bohner (Photo: Palasranjan Bhaumick)

own dance. Dr. Lechner said that it was not a question of discarding something but of adding something. Kumudini Lakhia said that the responsibility lay with the dancers and critics.

"Dancers must keep the dialogue open—before, through and after. Whereas here, we begin with the idea that every dancer on stage is a genius and that nobody has the right to question, to point out."

Sunil Kothari defended the critic's role in dance. Kumudini Lakhia interjected,

"Critics try to play safe because they are not knowledgeable about dance."

"Sunil replied,  
"Indian dancers are so safe in tradition."

Dashrath Patel said,

"Tradition is great, but you have to question. Reject what you do not need and build on the rest. Change is inevitable. We cannot go on using tradition as a convenient rubber stamp. Rather, we should identify our cultural threshold. How long can you go on ignoring yourself?"

He observed that the West seemed to have preserved its training and only then gone on to playing with form.

Dr. Lechner asked the modern dancers from the West:  
"Do you feel you can integrate the idioms of the Indian dance tradition into your dance?"

Susanne replied,  
"It would be difficult because while one can master the overall picture of the form, the language is totally different. The form is not so important. What is important is to get a feeling of movement."

Dr. Lechner wondered whether a practical workshop session following the Encounter would be useful. Some of the speakers said it might help in creating awareness but for genuine creative work, the time span would have to be much longer.

. . .

Later in the morning, Chitra Sundaram who has been living in England for the last two years, spoke about her work experiences in a foreign land.

"From the beginning, it was clear to me that the Arts Council in England, as is the way with cultural establishments elsewhere, has its own set patterns of working and if one wanted to work within the system one had to accept the prevailing rules. I could participate in the Council's aid programmes only as a classical dancer of the 'ethnic variety'. I strongly oppose this idea of Bharata Natyam being categorised as an 'ethnic variety', while ballet and Western dance forms stand apart on their own. Proper terminology should be devised for individual dance styles rather than attributing a general label like 'ethnic'. Within this slot, however, I have found opportunities to work and perform. I started teaching Bharata Natyam at the Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan and at the Commonwealth Institute. Initially my classes included Whites, Asians and Africans. Then the Westerners started dropping out because they found it difficult to mould their bodies according to the Indian idiom. My own encounter with Western dancers came in a mixed concert entitled *Visions of Rhythm* performed with two English dancers wherein I used the Bharata Natyam technique. The first piece was called *No Man's Land*. In the second piece (*No Boundaries*), I tried some variations. I had always been a solo dancer.





Chitra Sundaram (Photo: Pankaj Shah)

and at first I found it difficult to work with groups, but slowly I began to enjoy the experience. As an Indian dancer, I have never shared the stage with anyone else. I've never danced to silence or just to sounds. My solo work gained through the experience of interaction. I feel that behind any experiment there has to be intellectual conviction and passion. When I perform I sometimes feel that I am justifying my art, my presence in a White society."

In the ensuing discussion about East and West dance forms and techniques, Ram Gopal noted that, unlike in the West, dancers in India tended to neglect their prime instrument, the body, allowing it to grow flabby and obese.

Stephen Long, of the Festival Ballet, London, who is seeking a personal idiom, gave a detailed lecture-demonstration on ballet. He spoke about its history, development, its training methods ("a humbling experience") and preparatory work before a dancer could be put on the boards. He also demonstrated some pieces from classical ballet with the help of an ex-ballerina Sekiko, from Japan, now living in Bombay. Together they showed the 'pas de deux' and standard ballet techniques and poses. He raised the point that though there was such intense emphasis on training and physical control in dance schools, there was hardly any talk about the artistic aspects of the medium. In fact, he felt that the West was in danger of losing the *feeling* in dance. The ballet repertoire furthermore provided mainly for stereotyped roles and functional more than individualised tasks for the corps de ballet, which added to the general frustration. The *guru-shishya parampara* of India was something ideally suited to filling such lacunae in an artiste's development. While there were many people who danced, few among them were artistes in the true sense. About the Encounter, Stephen remarked, "I'd like a more direct encounter." Stephen then introduced Tushna Dallas who runs the only recognised ballet school in Bombay. She spoke briefly about her training and her experiences as a ballet teacher in India.

Then, Ileana Citaristi gave her impressions of learning Indian dance—Odissi and Chhau—while coming from a Western background. For her, dance had come



Ileana Citaristi, Sharon Lowen, Susanne Linke and Bharat Sharma in an impromptu piece. (Photo: Pankaj Shah)

in a roundabout way, strangely enough through her involvement with philosophy and questions such as "Who was Krishna?" As a Westerner, she felt she had the freedom to approach this question as she understood it and not with the religious overlay of the Indians. For instance, "Krishna is whatever I want." She never thought of becoming a dancer and had begun her search for a technique only as a means of expression. Originally she had planned to stay in India for only a few months to fulfil the parameters of her research. But, "I stayed because I found a content so flexible and elastic and a form (technique and discipline)". She began with the typical Western approach but soon found that she had to adjust herself to her area of inquiry in a new manner. She then began to understand the student—guru relationship, which in the beginning was alien to her. At this point of time, she feels that she would like to learn how to be independent of her guru and develop her dance in an independent manner. Consequently, the question to which she addressed herself was: for whom and why am I dancing? Her experience of living with her guru's family in Orissa became a choice of life and this has been her home for the last five years. "I was learning all throughout the day. It made whatever I was learning much more complex." At the end of her exposition, an impromptu piece was attempted with four dancers from entirely different idioms: Susanne Linke, Sharon Lowen, Bharat Sharma and Ileana herself. They danced to the sound of the sea recorded by Ileana near the Konarak temple in Orissa and the improvisations were quite revealing. Susanne Linke, and, to an extent, Bharat Sharma suggested the forever-changing patterns, the tossing, breaking and foam of the waves. Sharon Lowen stressed the permanence of the waves through continuously repetitive movements. Ileana struck a middle course and tried to balance the two extremes. Like the improvised dances against the ticking of a metronome after Uttara's talk, this experiment, too, resulted in a sharp focus on Eastern and Western concepts of creativity.

Friday, January 27.

Ritha Devi related her experiences of staying abroad. In 1972, she began to teach dance at the New York University. But "spiritually and emotionally I never really left my country".

In New York for the last eleven years, she "missed the atmosphere of challenge and the scope to discuss dance". Her first three years in New York were a gruelling experience for her; she could not find a place for practice. Once, she attended a service in a Methodist Church and was so impressed that as an expression of friendship for the congregation she composed *The Lord is my Shepherd* which was well-received. This encouraged her to experiment and she added to her repertoire *Aspects of Love*. Then a solo dance-drama (*Three Sevikas*) depicting the plight of three well-known women of history who had suffered untold miseries—Ambapali, Draupadi and Mary Magdalene. In depicting the last figure, she used thirteenth century French music which she found akin to our Indian music.

Later, she began experimenting with Christian themes, using Indian dance techniques though the music remained a combination of the East and West. In 1980,

she presented *The Song of Solomon* with Odissi movements because she found its essence close to the *Geeta Govinda*.

"Whatever I have done is not a gimmick but offered in all sincerity. I now want to enlarge my repertoire to include Greek, Roman and Jewish mythological themes and depict the sufferings of women in a male-dominated world."

Dr. Lechner remarked, "Employing traditional techniques for parallel myths is only a variation on a theme and hardly innovative."

Ritha Devi replied,

"I had to use my own Indian dance techniques, my own way of expressing and if that makes me less of an innovator, I don't mind."

Igor Wakhévitch remarked that Ritha Devi was totally stuck in the mythological element and that it is "very important to break this mental structure". Dr. Lechner said that any mythological structure had several levels and at least one level remains beyond our understanding.

Chandralekha's presentation is reproduced on p. 60.

Anne-Marie Gaston, or Anjali (the name given to her by her guru) talked about her initiation into Indian classical dance. Her first encounter with Indian dance came while she was serving as a social service volunteer of the Canadian University Service Overseas (CUSO). She was first sent to Chidambaram to study Tamil. Every evening she would go to the great Nataraja temple, past the *Karana-s* and it was this that inspired her to begin her dance studies even before she had actually seen a full Bharata Natyam dance recital.

"Had I seen a recital first, the intricacies of the movements could easily have discouraged me. Learning the dance proved an excellent vehicle for a study of South Indian culture. Fascinated by the myths I began to trace their origins in texts and their varied depictions on the walls of temples. I travelled extensively to most of the major Hindu and Buddhist monuments to photograph and study them. I was at the same time learning the various dance styles of India."

She demonstrated how the *Tripurantaka* manifestation of Shiva can be briefly depicted in dance with a few gestures. She ended in a pose carved on the Muvar Koil temple in Kodumballur (Tamilnadu). She also gave a short account of several literary references to Shiva as *Tripurantaka*, and referred to her book *Shiva in Dance, Myth and Iconography*. Since dance cannot be fully appreciated in isolation from the other artistic traditions of literature, sculpture and painting, her dance presentations always incorporate slides of myths as depicted in painting and sculpture.

Anjali then spoke about her work in Canada which involves teaching, performing and lecturing.

"In fact many children of Indian origin, born in Canada, now learn about Indian dance and customs from me."

At the University of Ottawa, she incorporates dance as part of her course on Hindu Art and Religion.

"The Western dance community still looks upon Indian dance as something exotic and possibly unapproachable despite the pioneering efforts of Uday Shankar, Ram Gopal, Ted Shawn, etc."

. . .

Dr. Sunil Kothari presented a historical perspective of the West's interest in Indian dance and themes. He began with an account of the Paris performance in October 1830 of *Le Dieu et la Bayadère*, (choreographed by Filippo Taglioni) and the presentation of *Shakuntala* in 1858 (choreographed by Lucien Petipa). He referred to Marius Petipa's production of *La Bayadère* at the Marynski Theatre in St. Petersburg. The role of the bayadère has been performed over the years by Maria Taglioni, Anna Pavlova and more recently by Natalia Markova. He mentioned other efforts including Michel Fokine's *Scheherazade* with music by Rimsky-Korsakov and décor by Leon Bakst. These were early attempts at producing ballets, distantly related to Indian themes, but the techniques of presentation were wholly western. For their source of information, the choreographers relied on books, museums and art galleries. In themselves these ballets were not significant enough to engage the serious attention of the West, but, in a sense, they roused the interest of Indians in their own heritage.

An important signpost was *Radha*, a solo item by Ruth St. Denis. It was extremely popular as were her other pieces, all stemming from Indian myths or themes. Sunil Kothari recounted the experiences of Ruth St. Denis and Ted Shawn during their company's four-month tour of India and the impact of their creations in the cities of the East and Europe. Ruth St. Denis herself admitted that the dances were her own creation and not authentically Indian. She sought to recreate the spirit of Indian dance rather than reproduce its forms. The memorable creation *Siddhas of the Upper Air*, presented at Jacob's Pillow in 1964, was a final tribute to India, which had been the fountainhead of the inspiration of Ruth St. Denis and Ted Shawn.

Sunil stressed the importance of Anna Pavlova's advice to Uday Shankar, Rukminidevi and Madame Menaka to turn to India's own dance heritage. He described in detail her creations based on Indian themes. He also spoke of La Meri's contribution, her training in Indian dance, her collaboration with Ram Gopal and her attempts to interpret Western ballet themes in the Indian dance idiom. He referred to the work of Ragini Devi and several Western scholars and dancers who helped to create a serious interest in Indian dance. He also described Maurice Béjart's productions and their impact.

Sunil Kothari described the situation today: Western scholars and dancers visit India to study Indian dance seriously and recreate it authentically. Indian dancers tour the West, interpreting and demonstrating the traditional dance forms. India's dance heritage is now shared by artistes all over the world.

Later, Shirin Vajifdar spoke briefly about her training and experiences.

. . .

Andreine Bel spoke next.

"I do not claim to follow any school of dance in particular but I stand at the cross-point of different traditions belonging to both East and West. Initially, I was a student of Malkovsky who, in turn, was a student of Isadora Duncan. I found an affinity between her way of dancing and the very fast movements of Kathak. Four years ago, I came to India to study Kathak with Birju Maharaj. The laws of movement and the aim of dance are the same. For whatever you do, there must be a meaning. I also learnt a great deal by observing nature and other art-forms. The movements of the sea are a superb dance of nature. A wave just cannot make a wrong movement."

She then demonstrated *Thaat* and *Gat-Bhava* in Kathak and her own interpretation of free dance to Beethoven's music.



Andreine Bel (Photo Palasranjan Bhaumick)

Kumudini Lakhia spoke of her 40-year association with dance. Looking at Ram Gopal who was in the audience, she reminisced: "I had danced as Ram Gopal's partner when I was still a young girl. We toured the world, visited forty countries and I was exposed to a lot of dancing. Later, I felt I was being dishonest whenever I danced in the Bharata Natyam style because I did not know the languages of the South and the words of the compositions. I chose the idiom of Kathak because it is closer to my understanding. In 1957, I began my training under Shambhu Maharaj. In 1958, I appeared in a Kathak ballet. The presentation was in every way a disaster. Soon I began to feel oppressed by the tradition of religion. I came to a stage when I wanted a divorce from Krishna. I had to breathe free air and when I looked out of the window I saw women whose plight I wanted to depict. The result was *Duvidha* which was severely criticised. I wanted the face to help my body to express (the reverse of what happens in *abhinaya*). We must have our own laws of expression. I tried to put my ideas in practice in *Kolahal* (the story of a young college boy), *Premachaksha* (a dialogue between a blind girl and her sighted friend) and *Sargam*.

"The conditions in which Kathak is performed today are quite different from earlier times. The word to word, line-to-movement *abhinaya* of Kathak is so effective in a small hall or a temple. Today these minute movements can hardly be seen by spectators in the last rows of an auditorium "



Kumudini Lakhia (left) with Ram Gopal and Satyavaty Gopalan  
(Photo Palasranjan Bhaumick)

Kumudini explained her training methods. She prepared her students to fit into any patterns. It is very important for a guru-shishya to have a strong understanding and while learning one hardly dares question the teacher. But we have situations where guru-s hate their shishya-s and vice-versa.

Kumudini described the changes that have occurred in Kathak itself, the various influences that moulded it and affirmed that India's dance tradition allowed for freedom and change.

"I don't want to hold a flag. I want my hands free to dance " Kumudini then presented an *abhinaya* piece and her students demonstrated some of her innovations.

• • •

Patrizia Cerroni has created a very personal body language, a technique of moving. But she goes on changing. "Your thoughts differ as you advance in years". She started as a choreographer at the age of nineteen, and has been experimenting for the last fourteen years. She spoke of her meeting with Zakir Hussain five years ago. She has since been visiting India every year.



Patrizia Cerroni (Photo Pankaj Shah)



"The method of my work is based on a study of the capacity to read mutual thoughts, imagination and sensations. The essence of these elements appears as symbols through sounds and movements within the structure of my dance."

She showed her latest group work on video. She first creates the movements and then certain sounds are selected for the purpose of experimentation. "My freedom guides me in my choice."

. . .

Elisabeth Mauger said that her initial training was in ballet. When she was twenty she began to learn modern dance in New York with Merce Cunningham and members of his company. Then she started to perform and teach in France. She believed in training the body first before creating new works. She demonstrated the basic modern dance exercises.

Sunday, January 29

Dr. Narayana Menon, Chairman of the Sangeet Natak Akademi, was the moderator during this session.

Dr. Lechner referred to some of the issues raised during the Encounter: "What is the relationship between art and life? Why do we dance the same repertoire time and again. In the west, dance takes a new direction every ten years. What happens here?" He spoke of the importance of group choreography as opposed to solo excellence, particularly in the context of the Indian dance scene. He asked: "What do we dance for? Is story, music really necessary in dance?"

Dr. Menon said that in India dance had to be viewed as part of a comprehensive tradition. "One must remember that there is very little solo work outside the metropolitan centres. For instance, in a place like Manipur, other aspects of dancing together are important." Mrinalini Sarabhai said that India did have a dance-drama tradition though not quite the same as group dancing.

Carmen DeLavallade observed that, in the Indian context, content was more important than form. Dr. Lechner then asked Dr. Menon: "What is form and content in music other than sung, that is instrumental pure music? It may help us to understand what is form and content in abstract dance."

Dr. Menon replied: "These are universal phenomena. What is content in Darbari Kanada on a surbahar? Does it mean anything? . . . Because it's a creation, an abstract creation of the concept in music. Not very dissimilar from a fugue or an unaccompanied sonata for the violin or for the cello by Bach. What is the meaning? What is the content? . . . I'm talking about a

fugue in the abstract by a creative musician, like an *alaap* (on the surbahar or on the veena) of a *raga* created yesterday or created 1500 years ago. We don't necessarily have to look for content or the meaning of that work. . ."

"If it is not content or form, what is it?" asked Dr. Lechner.

Dr. Menon: "A piece of art is the recreation of the essence of a particular tradition at a particular point. For instance, the *raga* Darbari Kanada created by Tansen at the Mughal court in the sixteenth century or the *raga* Parameshwari created by Ravi Shankar five years ago. It does not have to have a meaning."

Dr. Lechner: "How successful are we when we use Bharata Natyam or any other traditional form to express a content (like suicide) which is different from its usual repertoire of Krishna-Radha myths? Do we break the form to create new things? Does this work?"

Dr. Menon observed that there was an enormous change in techniques and it is "the terminology which lets everybody down. We don't always mean the same thing by the same word." He mentioned a symposium which was being planned by UNESCO on the subject of terminology itself.

Chandralekha: "Words like *guts*, *heart* suggest a mix-up of sentiment and the language of body and dance. Our tradition has keywords which are very precise and valid even for what we feel today. For instance, *jivasvara*, mentioned by Chitra Sundaram a minute ago. *Jiva* can be there in western dance, Bharata Natyam, Kathakali, Merce Cunningham. Where is that *jiva* we ask? We are looking for something so small, so ephemeral, something that you cannot capture or define in words but know only at an experience level; a dot radiating, pulsating. . . Everything has to have that small centre from where everything emanates, from where everything expands.

"We must go back to these terms. *Mandala*, for example, which can be used for the whole universe, or in philosophy or architecture, painting, sculpture, dance, body and within the body for its many gyrations. Or *rasa*, the vital fluid, the sap. . . We should say the dance *touched*, not that it was excellent.

"This form and content breakdown is western oppression. I think the west is imposing its terms on us. That's why we are talking at cross purposes. The form and content debate does not belong to us."

Uttara agreed that the terminologies did exist, "but the point is how many of us know them."

Jamshed Bhabha: "Every art must expand one's sensibilities and one's experiences and one's capacities for new experiences." He granted though that "it takes time to understand a new idiom." Further, "You cannot translate music into anything other than music. It's the same with dance. You cannot verbalise it adequately."

All the participants agreed that there was an urgent need for a basic terminology; for workshops with more practical aspects of dance as their core; for seminars to educate dance critics; and for better dance floors and more rehearsal space.

Dr. Menon urged the participants not to lose their sense of chronology and reminded them that some terms like *raga, tala, rasa* can be explained but something is always left out. They do not mean the same thing to everyone and many cannot be translated at all.

The note on which the discussion ended was "East is not East and West is not West but the two, I'm sure, will encounter."

---

Complementing the daily discussions were, at the end of the sessions, screenings of films or excerpts of films on dance, East and West.

### **Pas de Deux**

Directed by Norman McLaren, National Film Board of Canada, 1962, 13 mins., featuring Margaret Mercier and Vincent Warren.

### **Ballet Adagio**

Directed by Norman McLaren, National Film Board of Canada, 1972, 10 mins., featuring David and Anna Marie Holden.

### **Kalpana**

Directed by Uday Shankar, Uday Shankar Productions, 1948, 154 mins., featuring Uday Shankar, Amala Shankar & others.

### **Maya Darpan (excerpts)**

Directed by Kumar Shahani, NFDC Productions, 1972, 114 mins., featuring Aditi, Anil Pandya & others.

### **Shakuntala (excerpts)**

Directed by Jörn Thiel, WDR Cologne, featuring Mrinalini Sarabhai, Mallika Sarabhai and students of DARPANA, Ahmedabad, and based on Franz Schubert's composition of the same name.

### **Bala**

Directed by Satyajit Ray, NCPA and Tamil Nadu Government Production, 1976, 33 mins.

## **Dear audience, cast the right net . . .**

Georg Lechner

"These Western dancers", one spectator at the East-West Dance Encounter sighed, "you never know what they are up to next!" True, even the highly predictable ballet performance by Stephen sprang a surprise, offering a special number *Meditation*. Leave alone the rest . . .

Here indeed, is a decisive difference that distinguishes contemporary Western dance from contemporary—and as ever classical—Indian dance. The latter is characterised by a solid pact between dancer, *guru* and *rasika* (knowledgeable member of the audience), based on a common world-view and guided by age-honoured set rules. Codification, sublimation—any deviation from the tradition and the norm will be frowned upon. The former is ever open to innovation, intensely personal, sans ideological taboos. In the West, there is, of course, also a pact between dancer, teacher and audience, but one whose first clause guarantees artistic freedom. The implications on both sides are momentous.

Dear audience, lean back for a moment and ponder.

The western flair for change and inquisitiveness is easily identified as a natural offspring of the Age of Enlightenment and Reason. Religious Faith and Reason had been engaged in age-old struggles, with Faith acting as the undisputed master relegating Reason to second position. The transition into modern thinking was far from smooth and is generally underrated or flatly misunderstood. Centuries of witch-hunting, inquisition, excommunication, crusades, people like Jeanne d'Arc, Giordano Bruno, Copernicus, Martin Luther, Immanuel Kant, Galilei (his treatise *Dialogo*, renouncing the Ptolemaean world-view in favour of the Copernican, was put on the Index and remained there from 1633-1822) all bear witness to the slow and painful emerging of Reason as a guiding human principle. Faith knows, Reason wonders, again and again.

Back to dance: historically speaking then, Western dance developed against this background, from ballet to post-modern dance forms, and was part of the whole spectrum of intellectual, scientific, social and artistic processes. As the times changed, so did the dances. At this stage of an East-West Encounter, it is therefore probably more relevant for an Indian audience to consider these general parameters of Western dance rather than its technical intricacies (as a western audience will be well advised to have an inkling of the deep structures in Indian dance before mastering the *mudra*-s). The ballet, for instance, may be traced back to the Italian courts around 1490, but took a century before it made its entry onto the French stage and another century before it entered Germany. It was not before 1740 that the present "tutu" was introduced. The first year of the nineteenth century then witnessed the homage of the great Beethoven to the new dance form, with his *Creatures of Prometheus*; in 1870, Wagner followed with the famous ballet scene in *Tannhauser* and so did a host of others from Tchaikovsky to Stravinsky.

All along, ballet had, in spite of its justified claim to the lineage of a purely classical art form, mirrored the changing times. The toe-point technique, the *en dehors* position, the clear straight body line, the soft and elastic plié that prepared for jumps, for conquests of space, all of which combined a new mathematical precision and discipline with ethereal ease and harmonic grace. In the *pas de deux* it reflected the newly gained social status of the woman and in its beauty it mirrored its basic belief in the grandeur and dignity of man, in the beauty of his physical appearance. "Humanism", the hallmark of the eighteenth century, Herder had declared, "is the character of our race". But while this humanistic ideology "internationalised" ballet on the European stage, it also prepared its reform. The leading dance personality of the time, Jean-Georges Noverre, is a case in point: over long years he worked in many different cities, Paris, Berlin, Stuttgart, Vienna, Milan, London, disentangling ballet more and more from the courts and turning it into a heroic-dramatic dance form capable of embodying the new political philosophy of freedom and equality. Diaghelev was the next reformer in line, carrying ballet over into this century, intact, and yet open to reform.

At the beginning of the twentieth century, the old humanistic edifice began finally to crack and crumble. The constraints of technology, social exploitation, functionalism and bureaucracy, fragmentation and isolation alarmed the artists deeply: the former dignity of the human face gave way to a grimace, tonality turned into atonality. Dada and Surrealism swept the old order, and expressionist dance with Isadora Duncan and Mary Wigman replaced much of the traditional dance scene. Isadora tried to free dancers from their heavy inventory of codified rules and their decorative outfits to achieve a new spontaneity. Mary Wigman breathed soul and feeling into dances that were allowed to overrule traditional patterns. Kurt Joos took up social themes, like the city jungles and war, in a style that freely mixed modern dance techniques with those of classical ballet. George Balanchine further developed ballet by ridding it of its former submission to a narrative line.

The deep involvement of the visual arts with abstract forms soon heavily influenced dance. The American School of Dance was to be born with brilliant names contributing to it: Rudolf Laban, Alwin Nikoia, Doris Humphrey, Martha Graham, Merce Cunningham. They now studied the objective, universal laws of body movement against the earlier, heavy, thematic and emotional arsenal of ballet and even expressionist dance. If classical ballet had worked with harmony, modern dance worked with disharmony as a source of movement, and discovered the dynamics of contrasts—much as science had time and again made revolutionary discoveries by toppling a prevailing scientific taboo, from Copernicus to Einstein. Actually the discovery was not new—Yin and Yang preceded it, so did Yoga—but it worked in a new way. Martha Graham spoke of tension and release; Doris Humphrey of balance and imbalance; movement, as the critic John Martin said, and Merce Cunningham never tired of pointing out, became the actual substance of dance. (It was not always pure dance, though, if one remembers that Rudolf Laban had endowed his movement research with social responsibilities when he tried to ease the British industrial labourer's lot during the war by developing a catalogue of more effortless and less tiring hand and body movement. Research, Hiroshima teaches, even of the most fundamental nature, is never allowed to remain "pure").

One had come a full circle: in ballet, ethics and aesthetics coincided, good was beautiful and vice-versa. When the old unity disappeared and fragmentation appeared, form swallowed content. In American modern dance, the question of ethics was not even raised, it simply collapsed. Movement was movement was movement. A rose is a rose is a rose.

It was evident that this purist's stance was not to remain unchallenged for long. Jazz dance, with all its stress on sheer rhythm and movement, had already introduced a strong emotional element—that of joy and ecstasy of movement. It was, foreseeably, Europe, or more precisely Germany, the earlier citadel of expressionist dance (*Ausdruckstanz*), that later on responded strongly with a kind of dance-theatre that nearly abolished dance movement in the process. The pendulum was in full swing again. Pina Bausch brought the drama and predicament of modern life into glaring focus, swept the stage clean of pretty décor and pleasing virtuosity and shook the dance scene in the seventies. Susanne Linke, Reinhild Hoffmann, Brigitta Trommler continued the work. Others looked East or South; Maurice Béjart asserted his own style. Meanwhile, the good old ballet that had so generously given to modern dance, staged its own comeback by freely borrowing from modern dance. The flower had admitted it needed the bee. John Cranko blossomed out and soon it became difficult to draw a clear demarcation line between the two, even down to the names of the companies. More recently, John Neumeier's Hamburg Ballet Company enacted the drama of the death of Jesus Christ, to the great music of Bach's *St. Matthew's Passion*. Just one amongst innumerable examples in which *Swan Lake* and *Giselle* had ceded their places to new superstars.

This fast-changing and highly pluralistic Western dance scene, I repeat, is but the mirror of parallel developments in theatre, literature, music, the visual arts that, in turn, reflect the restless, and yet creative, social and scientific temper that marked the West from the sixteenth century onwards. Society, the audience as it were, has always been part of this process. In dance, this intense interaction between dancer and audience, is also borne out by the phenomenon of the ever-changing dances à la mode; since the mid-twenties, one fashionable society dance followed the other on its heels: Jimmy, Slowfox, Samba, Charleston, Cha Cha Cha, Rumba, Swing, Lambeth-Walk, Boogie-Woogie, Mombo, Rock'n Roll, Twist, Shake, Soul, Hustle, Disco...

The performances of the Western dancers—Susanne Linke, Gerhard Bohner, Carmen DeLavallade, Patrizia Cerroni, Stephen Long, Elisabeth Mauger, Dominique Bagouet and even of Uttara Coorlawala and Astad Deboo—may be firmly placed within a definite "historical" context, whatever their claim on individual creativity, or their differing degrees of achievement. Even the seemingly endless Western dance forms, dear audience, have their *parampara-s* and *gharana-s*. Susanne Linke, one of the most touching and impressive dance personalities in Europe today, draws her lineage from Mary Wigman, Dore Hoyer and Pina Bausch; Gerhard Bohner's family line is Oskar Schlemmer, Rudolf Laban and Alwin Nikoia; Elisabeth Mauger is a direct offspring of the Merce Cunningham school; Patrizia Cerroni is a descendant of the free dance styles of the American and German schools (especially Jean Cebon); Dominique Bagouet is an intriguing crossbreed of Carlson and Béjart; Uttara hails from the Graham school; Astad

combines the family traits of José Limon and Pina Bausch; Carmen incorporates the stylistic elements of all major American dance schools, with Alvin Ailey topping the list, and with a strong Broadway theatre flavour and the typical flair of the black dancer for jazz; Stephen finally flies the classical ballet flag, pure and noble.

His was, no doubt, the easiest accessible performance for the Indian audience, although his *Meditation* may have raised an eyebrow or two. The absence of a *pas de deux* and a *corps de ballet* was a poignant reminder of their importance in any ballet performance, while the preceding ballet class drove home the truth that the training in this art form is, the charm of the ballet master notwithstanding, one of the most demanding and excruciating physical exercises. A propos of *corps de ballet*: Stephen Long was on a year's leave of absence from the London Festival Ballet to take a step back from the routine and have a close look at his art. "I have a relatively short stature", he explained, "so my place was to be the *corps de ballet* or for minor character and half-solo roles and I was never to be Juliet's, Giselle's, Coppelia's, Cinderella's, the Sylphide's, the Sleeping Beauty's or the Dying Swan's partner". One wonders: is it not to the credit of Western ballet, symphonic music, choir singing, or modern dance that it does not only cater for soloists, but attributes a vital role to the team grouper, the supporting cast, the orchestra musician, the chorus line, for all its harmony, counterpoint and vibrating multi-dimensions, all its breathing in and out between the soloists and the *corps de ballet*?

Carmen's *Sweet Bitter Love*, her parody of exotic mannerisms and her *Song of Creation*, must have also communicated easily enough at their direct, theatrical and emotional levels. Where dance is in love with space and the gestures reach out, a tall, slim body and long limbs are seen to great advantage, they say.

Once the message of "pure dance" movement was half-digested and vaguely linked with the indigenous practice of *nritta*, Elisabeth Mauger's and Patrizia Cerroni's exercises appeared at least accessible, the flow and the discipline of movement kept the question of "meaning" at bay for the moment. But the hot pursuit for "meaning" continued with the hard-liners and flared up with Bohner's rigidly conceptual and relentlessly drawn out "black and white" dance forms. The challenge was almost of an aggressive nature: after all, even *nritta* never employed unfamiliar gestures, the *mudra*s may not draw a narrative line, but the rhythmic patterns were all the stronger for that, and certainly there was never silence, was there? But Bohner moved on unerringly, cutting out spaces from the air with his body clad in black and white, with or without music. Was this Merce Cunningham ripped of all its music gags and physical virtuosity? The space-body game "pure"? Would this total emotional reductionism hold as an act of purification from an effects-and-emotion-laden stage?

Actually, Dominique Bagouet worked basically with the same parameter, but added wit and spice. In his dance, the organic—symbolised by lettuce on the shoulder and cricket in the hair—was in permanent conflict or transition with the inorganic, represented by functional, geometrical lines. Vitality and fantasy versus rationality and functionalism, tossed about, punk-like at times, but held together by a convincing display of esprit and virtuosity. Antagonism, deeply felt and rendered, was the hallmark of Susanne Linke's expressional dances.

Man and woman, life and death, man's eternal struggle against a tide of meaninglessness, with music ranging from Schubert's expressive *Death and the Maiden* (2nd movement) to a rehearsal performance of Tchaikovsky, total involvement of body and soul, Susanne the dancer and the human being merging into one; sublimation not as a tradition, but as an individual and very personal achievement. "Dance is life", she had uttered with a pondering voice during the closed sessions, "but then life is everything . . .". Nowhere was the question of "honesty" in dance more earnestly put. What she also said was, half to herself: "To be totally honest to myself, I shall have to appear naked on the stage, one of these days, seen in the bathroom and at my most intimate and private, but I am not quite ready for that as yet". Nobody squinted or squirmed.

And Uttara, Astad? As Maurice Béjart in Europe, Lin Hwai Min in China, Sardono in Indonesia, Rey Philips in Africa have shown, the blending of even highly codified dance vocabularies of different origin is not only artistically possible, but even rewarding. If done competently, it may yield important innovative results. Isolation techniques of jazz dance, slow motion tempi or choreographical devices of ballet, thematic plurality or critical attitudes of modern dance, can all surely be wedded to Bharata Natyam or Kathakali, to create a new dance idiom. But the challenges that these experiments necessarily imply should be measured. Igor Wakhévitch's cosmic music *Winds of Shiva* was clearly beyond Uttara's grasp and the critical satire, as it surfaced in Astad's *Mangalore Street*, required more slickness of execution. Here, as there, the lack of a competitive and challenging local dance scene favouring experimentation is being felt. This is also why Chandralekha remained the only really innovative contributor on the traditional Indian side.

To sum up: over-or underreaction has always been the characteristic of audiences confronted with highly innovative stages in one's own or the first encounters with an alien art idiom. Stravinsky's *Rites of Spring* caused a pandemonium in the Paris of 1925 and Werner Egk's quite innocent ballet *Abraxas* was officially banned in the Munich of 1949, for its "lascivious character". The western participants of the Encounter gasped in face of the sheer beauty and vitality of Indian dances without grasping its present crisis. And the Bombay audience wallowed in the familiar, wondered at the experimental, frowned at the daring, ignored the incomprehensible and bowed—as ever—in the presence of greatness. And, as for the critics . . .!

Learn navigation, study the art of fishing and cast the right net, dear audience—the haul will be good.



## In Search of a Meeting-place of East and West through Dance

Uttara Asha Coorlawala

### Introduction

What is this Indian contemporary dance that you are doing? . . . is a question that I am continually being asked. Learning to answer such a question in words has been a difficult though necessary process, since my background has included training in the widely different styles of Graham and Cunningham techniques and Bharata Natyam. Through an analysis of my own works, I have become aware of the juxtaposition of choreographic devices that draw upon these diverse elements. This process has enabled me to evaluate what has been done and see that it is only a beginning in integrating cross-cultural influences.

### The body—a link

My experience and understanding of the environment, be it Eastern or Western, is through the perceptive functions and limitations of this body. I recall asking a choreographer whose dance I was learning, about the specific meaning of a movement (*Talking Desert Blues*, '72). Kei Takei struggled to find the right words as she only barely spoke English then. As I watched, her attention seemed

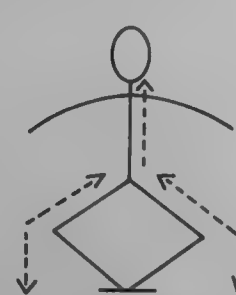


Uttara Asha Coorlawala (Photo: Pankaj Shah)

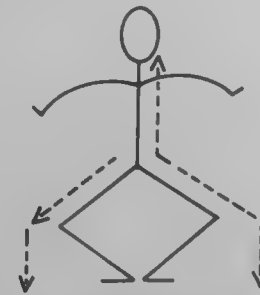
directed to her abdominal area. From there, it seemed to travel upwards through her chest to her head, where I could almost "see" words being formed before they were spoken. According to *Mantra yoga*, ideation begins in a place in our bodies that corresponds with the abdominal wall. It is the place where thoughts, dances and all creative events begin to take form. At the time of this subtle but unmistakably clear event, I had no knowledge of *Mantra yoga*. This incident startled me into wondering if somehow Kei had shown me a body place where, perhaps, a personal East meets with West. I have carried such thoughts and feelings within me through the later years.

On a more technical physical level, the concurrent study of classical ballet and Bharata Natyam has had a positive effect on my body. Contrary to prevalent opinions that this would be psychologically and physically damaging, I have found that these disciplines complement each other. Often, for example, my ballet and Bharata Natyam teachers make the same correction, though each uses his or her own terminology. Once, during the same week, both suggested adjusting the position of the femur (thigh bone) in the hip-socket during an extension of the leg to the side. Clearly, my body needed to make this adjustment to function more efficiently. Similar instances in my experience as a student, a performer and a teacher, have shown me that although East/West styles and approaches to movement may differ widely, the most efficient way to perform anatomically basic movements remains the same, provided that the doer and teacher are attentive and observant.

In contrast, a basic posture which may appear to be the same in Bharata Natyam and ballet, but which is actually a very different kinaesthetic experience for the performer, is the *ardha-mandi* (half-square) of Bharata Natyam and the demi-plié (half-folded) of ballet and modern dance. In this position, the head of the femur (thigh-bone) must be rotated outwards in the acetabulum (hip-socket). Knee and ankle joints are flexed also following the same turned-out direction. The feet are placed firmly on the floor with the heels close and the toes similarly angled outwards. The torso is centered, the sternum area (chest) is lifted. The back is open i.e. the scapulae (shoulder-blades) are pressed down and away from the spine.



Demi-plié  
Active resistance  
to rise or press away



Ardha-mandi  
Relaxes downwards  
to sit or sink lower

Up to that point the placement of the body appears to be in accord with both the *ardha-mandi* and the *demi-plié*. However, in the first, the thighs have to be consciously and deliberately relaxed. One imagines that one is sitting. This enables the dancer to retain this stance continuously for long periods of time and execute *adavu*, *thatti-mitti* etc., from this base posture. In a *demi-plié*, the action is of firming the muscles and pressing down into the floor. The *demi-plié* is used as a preparation for rising, turning and jumping. It is, therefore, incorrect to equate an *ardha-mandi* with a *demi-plié* because one is a basic stance, while the other is a transitional movement. The relationship of weight to gravity is predominantly active in the preparatory *demi-plié*.

Nevertheless, because most body actions involve opposing groups of muscles, both the active and the passive relationships of the body to gravity and of the muscles to the bones are inherent in the two styles. Learning to practise and discern these different body attitudes has deepened my understanding of what makes the body function effectively. For example, habitual repetition of the same warm-up exercises in different climates can be treacherous for the dancer. In a hot climate, as in Madras, for the same reason that the muscles relax quickly and easily into the 'sitting' position, the body must be actively toned. Conversely, in New York winters, *Hatha yoga* postures (*asana*-s) can be very helpful for releasing tension from the joints and muscles and enabling the body to function more flexibly. In this situation, a Bharata Natyam performer would need to warm-up the muscles with some exercises before relaxing gently into the sitting position. Thus, training in diverse dance and movement styles has supported my experience of performing in varied climates. It has taught me to be attentive to body attitudes (active and passive) and to counter-balance habitual tendencies rather than work against them or indulge them. In this context, Takei's example of being attentive to the body's reasons is not so mysterious as it first seemed. It is also important to be attentive to the body's needs.

Western systems of classical dance training seek to constantly extend the boundaries of physical limitation. Such increases in the range of movement open the way for discovering and inventing ever-increasing new forms. Western dancers learn to leap higher, form amazing shapes, move in apparently abrupt spurts or continuous flowing movements. Most Indian classical dance styles are based upon the natural capacities of the body. These may be stylized and refined but there is an acceptance of physical limitation. Even with this acceptance of relatively limited possibilities of form, profound aesthetic experiences are created. In opting for modern dance, I have chosen for myself a middle ground, a meeting place of many influences. Here the total body is involved in several aspects of exploring space and its own existing and extended abilities. On the other hand, both Graham and Cunningham have used their own personal physical limitations to advantage in evolving profound and beautiful movement systems.

*Shapes: another link.*

A movement or dance can be regarded as a series of changing shapes. In a dance, the shapes are usually more deliberately defined than in a random movement. As a dancer who choreographs, I have been deeply concerned with

shapes, relationships between shapes, and relationships between shapes and space. Here I would like to explain three ways of relating East/West shapes.

One shape-relationship is that of a single movement motif and its variations. The variations in this instance are derived from other dance vocabularies. A series of lunges, for example, starts with a low lunge evocative of an *adavu*, facing directly downstage. The torso curves round onto a diagonal lengthening into a balletic fourth lunge. This twists into an open-chested extended 'modern' lunge and twists again into an equally spiralled but more compact Odissi-like position.

Another way of linking several different kinds of shapes is by finding a common denominator such as symmetry and making it apparent. A series of consistently symmetrical movements are followed by a series of consistently asymmetrical movements. The common denominators, symmetry and asymmetry, make for continuity and relatedness, though the movements are of varied vocabularies.

A third choreographic device is that of developing a single movement idea through manipulative processes as augmentation, where the original shape is enlarged; diminution, where the shape is reduced, and isolations, where one part of the shape is repeated. The shapes can be rearranged backwards, or in arithmetical progressions as in *theermanam*-s, (*thai, di-di thai, thai thai di-di thai, thai thai thai di-di thai* etc.). Playing with these manipulations can be fascinating because so many possibilities and combinations suggest themselves.

Similarly, *adavu*-s are grouped according to a common theme as in the *thai yum da tha* or the *tha thai tham* series etc. . . They are developed out of similar manipulations of basic movement concepts as the symmetry of angles, the wind-shield wiper action of forearms and lower legs in relation to elbow and knee joints.

Out of a personal admiration for the completeness and intrinsic power of *adavu*-s, I have often included them in my choreography. Previously, I would 'quote' a part of an *adavu*, recognizable and intact, and change its relationship to preceding and following movements. It was my intention to reemphasize certain qualities of *adavu* shapes by placing them in a different context. (The choreography for the dance *Yakshi* ('73) and *Lakme* ('81) contains several examples of this device.) I did not change the forms themselves, because I felt that to do so would violate a code that I had not grasped and which Bharata Natyam dancers and *natuvanaar*-s might follow instinctively. I now understand that this code is not esoteric and uniquely South Indian. It is a series of mathematical and transformational processes common to musical forms, avant-garde and post-modern choreography, architecture and perhaps several other disciplines of East and West.

The concept of 'quoting' another author's work or movements is related to the Western concept where the artist accepts and claims credit and responsibility for whatever he or she has created. In classical Indian art traditions, the artist is considered merely as a channel for creative flow whose source lies beyond individuality. Thus, what is anonymously created belongs to no one. The question

of quoting or even of consciously seeking new forms does not arise. These works of art were intended to transport the perceiver to an experience beyond form through form—any form that would accomplish this end.

#### *Energized shapes—Yantra-s.*

If communication takes place on a non-verbal level in dance, then it must happen somewhere between and through the continually changing shapes formed by the dancer. Even when the dance is 'non-referential' or 'abstract' or concerned with 'movement for its own sake', still each shape has its inherent communicative energy which Jung calls its numinous value. In this context of 'energized shapes' in dance, I would like to share some thoughts on why and how I incorporate *hasta-s* and *asana-s* in my choreography. These thoughts are not unique or unfamiliar, but merely function as signposts marking phases of recognition.

When attending Bharata Natyam performances, I am first taken by the totality, clarity and power of the form, if it is well-presented. Several European and American persons have confided that they cannot understand why—because they are not especially concerned with Indian culture—but when they have seen Indian dance, especially *hasta-s*, they have experienced a sense of deep inner recognition. At other times, at Ganeshpuri, I have seen and spoken with people who in some kind of trance have danced, performed *hasta-s* and *asana-s* spontaneously without any previous training or conscious creative intent. So I have to accept that, at some level, *hasta-s* are not arbitrarily selected gestures with culture-bound meanings alone.

Still, to appreciate the dances more fully, I have to be informed as to the meaning of the *hasta-s* and the mythological context of the dances. At this point, I question whether any art form should be so far removed from an audience as to require so much explanation. But perhaps this is because I am seeing either mechanical or exaggeratedly 'expressive' performers! At other times, when the performer has been totally absorbed in the content and form of the dances, I have received insights while Krishna was stealing the butter, or the *navika* was pining for or scolding her wayward lover. I confess that these insights had little to do with these events, at least on the surface. From such performers, I have learned that each dance is a ritual, intended to purify and strengthen intellect, body and emotions by vicariously involving these same aspects of being in the perceiver, and the danced rituals *Dashaavatar* and *Natanam Aadhinavar* no longer seem like referential lists of attributes and exploits. Such dances become acts of *manasa puja* or mental worship, and function as techniques of disciplining the mind.

Modern dance demands that the performer develop an intimate relationship to every movement in each dance, but it does not expect the perceiver to understand the literal details of content. It aims at evoking the unspoken experiences of feeling life through abstract movement and music. Each perceiver is encouraged to respond according to his or her own inclinations. Yet for all its availability to the immediate senses, for me, modern dance lacks the support of such time-tested means of strengthening the mind and deepening experience that Bharata Natyam dancers have available to them, and which are built into the

training process. I want to incorporate these beautiful rituals into my own choreography. At the same time, I would like these understandings to be accessible to any perceiver, whether informed or not informed as to the literal content of the gestures and the dances. In Nada Clyne's trilogy of songs *Only I Am*, I attempted to follow this course.

I used my own gestures and *hasta-s*, but rarely literally. For example, the refrain of the third song is as follows:

I am Perfect  
I am Pure  
Only I endure  
I know no passing time  
Only I am . . . only I am . . . only I am . . .

How does one evoke perfection and timelessness in movement? The *hasta-s* of *Dhyana shloka* (*Natya Shastra* I) describe the specific attributes of the Indescribable Dancer, His body, costume and speech. Since Nada's song is about a cosmic choreographer and how we 'dance' our roles, I thought that this gestural description of the Indescribable Dancer was appropriate. While the hands perform the *hasta-s*, the body moves slowly forward, and the movements take on a ritualistic quality. Just a few dancers understand the specific gestures at this point. Most audiences simply respond to the ritualistic quality that the *hasta-s* add to the dance.

Ken Dychtwald, in his recent bestseller *Body/Mind*, writes of research among American psychologists and particularly in Essalen, on unresolved tensions and emotions which tend to settle in different body parts as tension. If the tension remains unresolved, it develops into muscular memories which become habits. According to *Hatha yoga*, regular practice of *asana-s* or postures serves to unblock embedded tendencies or *samskara-s*, blocks to self-awareness. My own recent experiences of *Hatha yoga* convinced me that this is so. While concentrating upon some physical functions, emotions as strong as fear or as subtle as impatience seemed to intrude upon my concentration. Simultaneously as these emotions were recognized and confronted, actual physical tensions were also released, and I felt as if the body had been clarified, realigned and energized. In the light of this recent experience, it is surprising to me that so few dancers (East and West) take advantage of this psycho-physical discipline.

Just as *asana-s* function as catalysts for the psycho-physical awareness of the doer, so *yantra-s* are visual designs intended to lead the attentive perceiver to spontaneous recognition of self-awareness. I see dancing shapes as moving *yantra-s*. Some of the ones that move me are the clean line of a pure classical arabesque, the deep contractions of the Graham technique in second position on the floor, and the spiralling turns in Mayurbhanj Chhau and Odissi.

#### *The method*

When comparing Eastern and Western dance forms, some of the aspects that might be considered are: body, shape, space, time, energy, effort, narrative and non-narrative forms, learning processes, continuity and experimentation, etc. . . By paying attention to each of these, one begins to distinguish how these can

be further divided into smaller elements. This facilitates the process of decoding inherent rules and understanding what is similar and what is different in these elements, and how they are used in the dance forms. With this information, one's awareness of creative possibilities expands. I have used this method to examine here, a few of the more tangible aspects of East-West relationships in dance, those of body and shape. My approach so far comes out of American modern dance, my exposure to the movement analysis systems of Laban and Delsarte, Lalvani's method of generating patterns, and my own perceptions of movements.

#### The learning process

The study of choreographic techniques is special to the American system though much of the original research comes from Europe, especially Germany. Another helpful American approach is the non-judgmental attitude to creative work, and the tremendous respect that Americans have for individual development and independence. An aspiring choreographer learns that there is a form, a truth inherent in any content that one may wish to explore. However, in order to penetrate to the basic form, one has to recognize and deal with the culturally acquired associations and habits that obscure the process. If, in classes, one is presented with ready-made techniques for choreographing, one is *not expected* to conform to only these techniques and for all time. They are offered merely as exercises to develop one's ability to choreograph. One is encouraged to think independently and depart with understanding from these formulae. In Indian and many Eastern cultures, originality and independence were traditionally equated with egoism and failure to comprehend the true essence of the tradition. This attitude appears to have changed on the verbal and intellectual level, but I have often encountered disbelief and even fear amongst dancers at the suggestion of departing from tradition.

A modern dancer is eventually accountable for his or her own performance and artistic development. In India, the aspiring performer and a master of the art form enter into a mutual agreement. The aspirant or *shishya* agrees to a long, demanding training period, and the guru accepts full responsibility for the *shishya's* development. A well-known Indian dancer once invited me to study with her, reminding me that since she was famous, I had only to gain by entering into this relationship. If I were to perform less than well, it would be her own reputation that would be affected. The reward earned by the *shishya's* continued act of faith is a corresponding freedom from the responsibility for the performance. Thus freed of anxiety, the student can be more completely concerned with the act of dancing itself. In performance, such *shishya's* seem to exude clarity, confidence and a tremendous enjoyment and involvement which perceivers experience or 'taste' as *rasa*. Whereas Indian theatregoers are familiar with this aesthetic experience and look for it, I have often heard western dancers comment about the sense of security evident in Indian classical dance concerts. These observations are usually accompanied by expressions of amazement and yearning for the same experience of total involvement.

The constant pressure of tremendous competition can stimulate and in fact demands total involvement, but it does not make for a sense of security. There comes a time when every dancer questions the personal value of functioning in such an environment, and needs a reason to continue. Modern dancers say that the instant of "connection" with the audience and applause are the rewards

they seek in their work. This instant of connection, which is affirmed by applause (in the West) is regarded as an innate quality, instinctive and extremely personal to each individual. This moment is either the result of inborn talent or a chance event.

In the Indian traditional arts, this moment of truth is viewed as an attainment, and the process by which it is acquired or attained is explicitly systematized. The concept of *sadhana* or self-evolution, through discerning discipline, relates artistic training to the spiritual path. According to this concept, by sustained and attentive practice of techniques (*upaya*) and centering exercises (*dharana*) an aspirant can advance his or her own capacity for awareness, and contact more deeply and clearly the inner sources of energy and creativity. Abhinavagupta equates this source of creativity with the Self, or the Witness of the mind and the emotions in each human being. Ideally then, a guru is not only an artistic preceptor but also a spiritual one.

There are some gurus who teach technical attainment with considerable understanding of yogic principles. However, those who actually live in consistent total relationship with this inner Self are extremely rare. The way to these beings is not easy, but they have the capacity to transmit their same understanding to disciples through a process called *shaktipat* and by example. Since their experience transcends art forms, the transmission of specific technical skills is not one of their primary concerns. In my own development, I value a relationship with a spiritual preceptor. I have not been able to find or accept a relationship approaching the totality of this one with a teacher of any one dance technique. For me, the disadvantage of the *guru-shishya* system is that the guru and tradition can too easily become a crutch, a cocoon of security. That guru is extremely rare, who encourages the *shishya* to strike out on his or her own, express individuality, and bear the brunt of questioning.

For me, the lives and actions of individuals like Isadora Duncan, Ruth St. Denis, Martha Graham, Merce Cunningham, Nureyev etc. speak of this courage and also of the security of an inner relationship with the creative source. These individuals (as so many avant-garde and post-modern dancers today) have pursued their ideals relentlessly, and as heedless of consequences to themselves as any yogis. Essentially, their dedication to "Dance" is not at all different from that of a *devadasi* dedicating a performance to, say, Nataraja. In my experience, the terminologies and processes in Indian and modern dance differ, but the goals are the same, and so are the pitfalls, like commercialism and the need for popular acceptance.

It has been my dream to work with a community of dancers in India—fellow *sadhaka's*—ready to support and confront one another to grow as creative performing artists. These working circumstances are not unusual amongst western modern dancers, but to date the Indian creative dancer who has departed from tradition has paid the price, often self-imposed and out of defence, of artistic isolation. At the East-West Dance Encounter, Bharat Sharma brought it to our attention that there does exist a sense of community amongst a very few choreographers and performers who follow the creative direction, the tradition of Uday Shankar. Artistic confrontation became an exciting reality for eight intense days during this Encounter, thanks to J. J. Bhabha's support and the tact and passion for dance of Dr. Lechner. For me, the question that remains to be answered is what can each of us do to support and continue this interactive process...?

## The Search is One

*(During the Encounter, Anees Jung talked to Susanne Linke, Chandralekha and Georg Lechner. Excerpts of the discussion are reproduced here.*

*— Editor)*

**Anees Jung:** Has the West really encountered the East?

**Susanne Linke:** East meets West and West meets East. It sounds as if they are two blocs. But they are essentially the same. The form perhaps is different, the education is different. The soul is one, the search is one. Like America, India is a land of unlimited possibilities. It nurtures the best and the worst. No one can go back from India the same person. To meet such intense beauty on the street . . . , feel the finest silk, glittering diamonds, jewels and in the next instant encounter filth, smell and rags. It is baffling. It changes one's whole way of looking at life. How it has affected me only time will tell.

**A. J.:** How does a European mind receive the Indian dance forms that are so complex, intricate and detailed?

**S. L.:** Nowhere in the world does a form like Bharata Natyam exist. It takes time to understand it. Even for me as a dancer. Everytime I have seen it I have thought it is great. Each time I see more. It is good for the Europeans to be conscious of it and have respect for it. Certain movements do not come to us naturally. Like the way a Kathakali dancer moves the upper part of his chest. Or the way the Indian people say yes with a gentle movement of the head. Our gestures are much harder. How beautiful and intelligent the Indian dancers are! To be able to do Bharata Natyam they must be intelligent.

**A. J.:** Are they also innovative, searching, aware?

**S. L.:** That is another thing. The Indian way perhaps is to accept life as it is. They do not ask or question or change things as we do. To search for new things in creative work is not yet a need with them. Maybe it has no use for them.

**Georg Lechner:** The type of people we are talking about dance in cities. They have been exposed to international publics, have had a modern education. So they react in a way we can talk about. But there are so many dance idioms that come from the same India of which we do not know. In the villages of Kerala or Orissa, for instance, live dancers who have never left their land, never known any other idiom. They don't understand us. They have never died in nuclear explosions of the type of Hiroshima or Nagasaki. Nor have they felt the terror that this might hit them next time as we have in Europe where the missiles are based.

There are many dancers who do not have our problems. But they are extremely devoted to their art form. They have reached enormous perfection in their techniques, they have a total view of life. At the same time, we have this modern world of ours that will affect these villages as well, if this great catastrophe will one day come or if the cities reach out into the countryside like technology has done in Rourkela. Then the dancer, like any other artiste, whether he be

Hindu, Muslim or Christian, is challenged. He is challenged in the sense that he has to face a new world with a new responsibility. He will have to ask himself: What is my art contributing to this new feeling, in this new environment?

Most of the dancers in the villages have been honest but they have never faced the challenge. But there are others who have come to us, who have had an education, of whom we expect that they take into their art ways of being touched by this new challenge. We find that they have not responded. They continue to dance as if nothing has changed. God has taken on new dimensions of terror. Don't depict him in the old way. Depict him including the new way. Or, if you don't believe in God anymore, then say so. If you want to invent something new, say it in a new language. If you cannot find it, say it in the old language like some of them have tried to—like Mrinalini, Kumudini and Chandralekha. None of them though have really found the new language. Because they have not been responding, not looking around, not living in this new world.

**A. J.:** Perhaps the new world has not yet entered their reality . . . ?

**S. L.:** I did find some of the new energy in Chandralekha's creation. It was intense, it was daring. Mrinalini too is a good arranger. She is very clever but she is too sure of herself. Kumudini is researching, questioning. Yamini is a marvellous dancer but seems to be completely wrong inside. Sonal is intelligent. She brings to her dance a personal feeling, a quality of poetry. She seems to be very secure and has reached a certain point in her career. She has worked and found her formula and is not searching anymore. Chitra too has a beautiful face. But her lines have not yet evolved and her body does not speak very much. The one who moved me the most was Sucheta. She is so soft, so passionate and honest.

**G. L.:** I do not agree with you. What surprised me was Sucheta's comment at the press conference. When questioned why Indian dance has not developed the way we had imagined she said, "because we don't feel the need for it." That's honest. That's herself. But for me it is not very interesting. That's why perhaps there is no great dance in India today. There are good dancers but not great dancers.

**Chandralekha:** It looks to me as if Indian dancers who have been dancing the traditional themes have come to a dead end. They are stuck in their bourgeois attitudes, in projecting their self-image, in competing with each other as persons, not as dancers. They have become weak, decorative and cloying.

**G. L.:** They cannot adapt to a new situation. Let us take examples from the Encounter. A framework was implied. Everybody can't dance for three hours as they usually do. They were asked to dance for an hour or less. Some responded beautifully to this and adapted to the new reality of dancing together in one evening which they never do. But some refused to accept the challenge. One of them wanted to dance the whole number the next day. Another could not adjust her two-hour solo performance to an hour. She only danced half her programme. A third demanded a deluxe suite and ten musicians instead of four. They projected a failure to cope.

**C.:** Relevance to me is not just finding solutions through dance but through exploring the limits and possibilities of other forms of expression—as through writing, painting, interacting with feminist groups. I have been doing as through writing, painting, interacting with feminist groups. I have been doing body workshops for them, carrying the basics of dance to women to help them understand their own bodies especially at the level of generating energy. Something that will help them strengthen their spine which means confidence: something that will make them aware of their own energy centres, their physicality, their sensuality, something that will help them maintain their dignity and cope with the social attacks they face everyday. Doing this is more relevant to me than coming to the city and putting on a dance spectacle.

**G. L.:** When we speak about dance we really speak about people. All the great dancers were fascinating people—Dore Hoyer, Mary Wigman, Martha Graham. In India when I see the dancers off-stage it frightens me. They have not really made the tradition their own language. I feel the tradition that is being danced out in India is no longer the centre of the belief of the persons who dance it. It may be marginal. But in dance they make it their centre and it rings false. In villages it may still be true. But in cities it does not exist. They should really develop a language that expresses their own centre and not someone else's that's past.

**C.:** In the villages it is integrated with life activity, with nature, with communal life, with their bodies. In the cities it is a spectacle, a commodity; it is market and box office. To develop that centre they have to distance themselves from the values of the stage and show business.

**G. L.:** Again, they do not enlarge upon their repertory. They dance the same numbers all over again. Why? Because it is not theirs and they can use it any number of times. They don't feel the need to grow with it because it is not theirs. If it was, they would change. Within the limits of the tradition perhaps. But change they must.

**C.:** Change does not mean going West. We have to find new directions from within our own form. We cannot create in a vacuum. Our dancers very often are not creators but practitioners of dance. That is why they do not respond to social realities. Historically, we have just reached that point of breakaway. When Yamini said that she felt jaded doing the same numbers she was at least aware. It is like following a menu card, I told her. You may be a good dancer but not a good choreographer. It is possible to make linkages, I suggested. To that she answered "I am open if they work under me." Her attitude is archaic. It reflects the social isolation of our dancers.

**G. L.:** At one time the guru in India justly received the kind of veneration we give our old books. Today the gurus too have changed. Many of them are no longer as worthy of respect. One of the dancers said off-stage that she hated gurus. The next day she was on the stage going through the ritual of bowing and touching the guru's feet. So the tradition goes on but the feeling of real respect no longer exists. Double standards abound. There is a discrepancy between the life of the dancer and the dance form. The Indian people are as passionate, as talented. But they are misdirected as everything is in a state of confusion. We must forgive and understand but we must not say it is good.

**C.:** To me gods in dance are totally irrelevant and ridiculous and always have been. Why should religiosity be brought on stage? It is more for public display. It is dishonest. I have always discarded the fake religiosity of dance. I have moved away from it in all my creative work. To me dance means a contact with myself, with my senses. It means heightening of consciousness, sensibilities, perceptions. At one level it is the sense of sight, smell and taste. At another it means energising yourself, humanising yourself. It is something so small, so intangible, so fragile. Yet it radiates life energy, extends dimensions at all levels.

**S. L.:** Dance has been my only way of expression. I did not speak for the first six years of my life. I could not understand anything or speak anything. The best way for me to express was through movement. Then I met the great dancer Dore Hoyer. She was for me the ultimate in dance. When she said I should become a dancer, I pursued it blindly like a religion.

**G. L.:** Susanne, you try to be honest to yourself and your art on two levels. You face what is important to you and express it. Secondly, you realise what is important to you could possibly be important to others. Since you are honest you search for a language that makes for communication. That comes across—your precision in art, your earnestness and purposefulness of the theme and your search.

**A. J.:** You mentioned that dance is an expression of your soul. The soul does not rest in one place. Its essences are scattered in life. Your search perhaps is to gather these essences and bring them to others. Isn't this almost a spiritual quest?

**S. L.:** May be it is spiritual but I am not thinking of God. Spiritual for me is just being honest.

**G. L.:** That's why we have problems with Indian dancers. No European dancer goes on stage and proclaims 'I believe in my god and guru'. Perhaps they are religious in their own way without saying it. A European dancer on stage does not look back to Chidambaram or the *Natya Shastra* but also looks around and forward.

The question in India now is whether this sacred element is honestly felt and is deep enough to carry on the dance in the next millennium. Either India goes back to the depths of its mythology or is honest enough to admit that we no longer have the temple dancer's view nor can we live that life. It needs to reflect on the new reality and evolve an appropriate language. Let it fail for a hundred years. We may not be moved by what is achieved but we would be moved by the effort.

The wonder that was India is no more. But enough of the glow is left which is worth kindling. It cannot however be kindled by one breath. The breath needs to be bigger, needs to be stronger.

---

Courtesy: The Times of India Sunday Review, dated February 12, 1984.



## Krishna or Godot?

Ileana Citaristi

During the evenings of the Encounter, on the stage, the gap was striking: the Eastern dancer all dressed up, ornamented and protected, the Western one naked, exposed, vulnerable. The latter, with wide-open eyes, expressed uncertainty, anguish, desperation in relation to the unknown; the former, with devoted and submissive eyes, expressed a longing for her beloved.

Krishna or Godot? Is the yellow-robed one, with the smiling face and inviting flute in his hands, the target? Or is the unshaped and indefinite aim of our existence to be evoked?

In both cases, body, space, energy, directions, music were used. The emphasis was different. Here the face, there the legs; here bright colours, there black; here the beat, there the off-beat; here the expected, there the unexpected.

In both cases, long years of training lay behind the conditioning of the body. The best among the Western dancers, for all their physical fitness, cannot move the neck, the torso or the fingers the way the Indian dancer does. The best among the Eastern dancers, for all their training, cannot raise the legs, keep balance or conceive a step out of the rules.

A conditioned medium for a conditioned human being! Many questions, doubts, proposals emerged during the closed sessions. Is the form or the content to be changed? Can a free dance exist in a traditionally settled society? Can the dancer keep out of social context?

One of the first discussions I had with my Guru, at the very beginning of my arrival in India, I remember, was about my external appearance. At that time, I used to let my hair remain uncombed. My dress was casual. My exterior reflected my inner mood. The freedom to choose whether to be an aesthetic object to be used by the male-dominated world or a liberated woman was part of my cultural background and was reflected in my attitude and behaviour. My Guru's arguments were completely different: there was no question of being or not being an object, of being or not being used, of accepting or not accepting the role. There was only one model to which the woman had to conform and the dancer, as a woman interpreting the model closer than anybody else, had to adhere to it even more. Guruji had rejected more than one student whose style of life was not in accordance with this model. This did not apply to the local Oriya girls, whose life is still more or less according to the rules, but to women coming from a more open and exposed context. Faced with this contradiction, what should a woman do: change her life or change her dance? I changed my life. In my own experience, at that stage, it was more revolutionary to accept a tradition than to be against it. I had already been naked and exposed during the years of vagabondage, of experimentation, and political struggle, during the years of rejecting and rebellion that have been part of my story as well as that of



Ileana Citaristi  
(Photo: Pankaj Shah)

a full generation of young people in the West. The present choice is not imposed on me, and I am ready to go beyond it as soon as it becomes unrelated to whatever I project into it. If you have found yourself once, you know that you cannot be lost any more even in a period of darkness or absence of anchorages. When the moon is completely dark, the new one starts to grow. If you are open to this dialectical approach, there is no question of old or new, traditional or modern; it is just a matter of being yourself.

But what does the symbol of Sita mean to a woman who in life has to follow this example compelled by her surroundings and not through her own choice? And again, what does it mean for a woman who rejects this model in her personal life but is still using it as the content of her artistic expression?

On the other side, there is the complete abandon and freedom of the Western exponent. In the process of alienation from the old and the traditional, everything has been discarded, the bad and the good, with the result that often the artistic expression has become too abstract, too technical or too extreme and abstruse. In one word, too 'void'. True, it reflects the aridity of our modern life, but that should not be an excuse for not trying to convey through the artistic medium an emotional alternative.

At this point we could say that the broad categories of 'East' and 'West' are no more to be referred to, because, as cultural contexts, both can lead to one or another kind of conditioning towards the individual and his expressional needs. The focus should shift towards the artist as a human being, the genuineness and sincerity of his involvement and dedication, the trueness and coherence in his life and his work. Shiva is eternally dancing his cosmic dance; it is not Odissi or Bharatnatyam, it is not of the East or of the West. It is the universal dance of creation and destruction, life and death, that modern man can understand in terms of energy, atoms, particles, magnetism and matter. It is sometimes joyful, sometimes wrathful, sometimes water, sometimes fire, sometimes at peace, sometimes full of tension. Can't we be inspired by this example of dynamism and freedom instead of only trying to copy iconographically his postures and depict stories and anecdotes?

Is a universal dance beyond geography, languages, costumes, themes and denominations no more possible? I know it is a "utopia"; but I just want to take a large breath in the stratosphere before coming back again to our atmospherical reality of Gurus, styles, modern, traditional, concrete, abstract, religious, profane. I am sure if we dancers, with different technical experiences but animated by the same honesty towards our search, could work together, a sort of rejuvenated and universal dance could emerge, comprehending the old and the new, the East and the West, the discipline of the body and the freedom of mind.

In the present reality of multinationalism and intercommunication between states and disciplines, art, in general, and dance, in particular, is still too linked to regional idioms and divided by geographical borders. The horizons should be opened and the cult of the 'prima donna' should be replaced by the cult of truth and the essential.

This first East-West Dance Encounter should open the doors to more and more "encounters" among dancers where, more than shows and talk, there could be experiences of life and work together.

Theatre workers have already taken several steps towards this getting together, sharing experiences beyond any difference of style and tradition. Can't we dancers, too, have regular International Dance Encounters, organised every time in different parts of the world, as a common platform of research and mutual enrichment and understanding?

I know that for some the myth still works. They do not find any discrepancy; they are still accepting the role assigned to them by society; they do not feel the urge to question, they are still happily living like puppets in somebody else's hands. But, those, who honestly feel that traditional training based on blind faith and silent execution does not help one to live in a conscious and responsible way and that the sophisticated and untouched world of classical dance does not reflect the needs and the urges of the world outside, should be given the opportunity to share these feelings in a common effort to find an alternative solution.

The continuity between life and art which, in the past, has always been responsible for the formation of any artistic expression seems at present to be lost behind empty schemes and repetitive formulae.

A tribal man uses his art to talk with God; whom does the modern man address when he repeats the same gestures on a modern stage? And whom does he speak to when he creates new gestures that nobody understands?

Both risks are there: from the East, the same and mechanical repetition and deception; from the West, the abstruse and, at any cost, new or the empty displaying of technique and perfection. And, in the middle, is a common ground of the coming together of artists as human beings, open to each other and ready to give and to take not for the benefit of any bank account but for a kind of mutual, spiritual and human enrichment.

## Contemporary Relevance in Classical Dance—A Personal Note

Chandralekha

One of the crucial experiences that shaped my response and attitude to dance was during my very first public dance recital (*arangetram*). It was a charity programme in aid of the Rayalaseema Drought Relief Fund. I was dancing *Mathura Nagarilo*, depicting the River Yamuna, the water-play of the *sakhis*, the sensuality, the luxuriance and abundance of water. Suddenly, I froze, with the realization that I was portraying all this profusion of water in the context of a drought. I remembered photographs in the newspapers of cracked earth, of long, winding queues of people waiting for water with little tins in hand. Guru Ellappa was singing *Mathura Nagarilo*. Art and life seemed to be in conflict. The paradox was stunning. For that split second I was divided, fragmented into two people.

Through the years this experience has lived with me and I have not been able to resolve the contradiction which, of course, is also a social contradiction. On the one hand, a great love for all that is rich and nourishing in our culture and, on the other, the need to contribute positive energies towards changing the harsh realities of life. For me, to be able to respond to the realities of life is as crucial as to remain alive and tuned to sensuality and cultural wealth. I have struggled to harmonise, to integrate these diverging directions in order to remain sensitive and whole.



Chandralekha demonstrates a movement. Watching her are, among others, Sunil Kothari, and Susanne Linke. (Photo: Palasranjan Bhaumick)

In the dance sphere, what I have found most lacking, is a dialogue within the discipline as well as at inter-disciplinary levels. We must generate such a dialogue if we want to infuse the classical dance situation with much-needed contemporary vitality. I am keen, therefore, to pose concepts and critiques to initiate a meaningful discussion, realising as I do the potential of aesthetic and cultural forms for liberating the human body and mind from inertia.

Being inheritors of colonial structures and institutions (of education, language, liberal values and, maybe, even notions of aesthetics), we cannot overlook the mediation of the West in shaping our approach to our traditional arts. Problems of revivalism, nostalgia, purity, exclusiveness, conservation, preservation, need to be examined. There is a tendency to swing between the polarities of rejecting the West to seek the security of our little islands or of accepting the West at the cost of a wealth of traditions and without any attempt to try and listen to what they have to tell us.

Such conflict stems from a lack of consciousness and an inability to comprehend the central and basic issues which, ultimately, are issues connected with integrated and humanised existence on our planet. The East, in order to be 'contemporary' in its expression, need not have the burden of using the West as a crutch or a ready reference. To me, to be 'contemporary' would mean to understand and express the East in its own terms; to explore to the full the linkages generated by valid inter-disciplinary principles common to all arts and central to the creative concept of *rasa*; to extend the frontiers of the loaded cultural language of our soil.

This will not happen without a struggle. Concepts like *loki* and *margi*, *mandala* or *rasa* were formulated by Bharata and Abhinavagupta centuries ago and are, even today, radical concepts in every sense of the term. Any move to generate *rasa*, a harmonious integration of the individual with himself, with his society and with nature, in an epoch of social fracture, is to enter the realm of human liberation and will be looked upon with suspicion. Thus the 'traditional' dancers, too, trapped in their repetitive slots and reproducing quantitative values, militate against *rasa* and can be accused of being contrary to the spirit of the early radicals.

I see dance as a visual, tactile and sensual language, structured with a specific vocabulary and idiom, with a space/time bind, with organic principles and, most importantly, related to the dynamics of energy and flow with a capacity to recharge human beings. The internal relation between the dance and the dancer and the external relation between dance and society are questions that cannot be taken lightly.

First of all, dance is an expression of physicality. In the course of human evolution, for a long time, physicality was a communal possession to be collectively expressed. The remnants of tribal societies show the basic unity of material life and physical expression. So we start from the fundamental premise that dance does not originate from heaven, that it has a material base, that it is rooted in the soil, the region, the community, in usages, work rhythms, habits and behaviour, food patterns and social relations and in racial characteristics like nose, skin, eyes, hair—a whole lot of accumulations that go by the name of culture and intimately

related to body attitudes, physiognomy and to work and tools. Even in its most stylised form, dance retains a certain universality of idiom and is an extension of and a supplement to spoken language.

The history of dance, then, cannot be separated from the history of the various stages of society. The variations in form are like variations in soil, climate, trees, vegetation. Over a long period of time, however, dance along with other arts and social functions, became integrated into the evolving hierarchical structures of society effecting a transformation in its role—from communal participation to communal consumption.

The codification of dance in a society that admitted a hierarchical structure introduced a process of rigidification in the roles of the performer and the spectator, propelling classical dance and dancers towards limiting, though exotic, specialisation and to a fossilisation of the form. Increasingly, the dances became a class preserve expressing an ideological content.

However, through all the distortions of the medieval period, the body retained a certain primacy and sensuality and played a vital role in maintaining human dignity in spite of much privation. It is when we come to contemporary times and an industrial/urban society that a sudden and harsh break occurs. The vital link, between body and nature, body and work, body and ritual, snaps. Dance becomes, almost totally, a spectacle.

A reversal, too, takes place. While traditional thought conceptualises the human body as a unique centre, a centre of the universe, expanding outwards into the cosmos, industrial society converts the human body into a prime target of attack: as citizen, attacked by the political system; as consumer, attacked by the economic system; as individual, bombarded by the media, denied contact with nature, incapable of self-renewal, suffocated by poisons in air and water, isolated and deprived of directions for change.

The question then arises: What role can dance play in such a society? Can it recuperate energies? Can it initiate a living flow between individual and community? Can it integrate human perspectives? Can it infuse people with joy for life, radical optimism, hope, courage and vision to negate all that is ugly and unjust and hurtful? If our life is alienated, can our dances and arts help to transcend that alienation?

I have experienced dance as a sensual language of beauty and of essential freedom; a language of coordination as against alienation; a movement towards the human essence, the sap, the vitality, the *rasa*. It is this aspect of classical dance and its unflagging potential to regenerate the human spirit that constitutes for me its contemporaneity and the reason why we need to work with the form. Any human mode with a capacity to touch, to energise, to transform is potent. Otherwise art is primarily to be lived. It is nothing but the *quality* of all that is made.

In the prevailing dance situation, there are certain negative features against which we have to guard:

- spectacular mindlessness;
- archaic social values;

- faked religiosity;
- idealisation leading to mortification of the form;
- numbing sentimentality;
- literalism, verbalism, dependence on *sahitya*, on word;
- mystification and dollification;
- perpetuation of anti-women values;
- rigid standardisation leaving no room for exploring;
- quantitativensness leading to conspicuous quantity of effects;
- easy assimilation into governmental designs for propagating a false 'image' of India, distanced from reality and replete with nostalgia;
- the distortions of the 'foreign' circuit which squeeze out all essence and convert classical dances into an item of cultural export;
- encroachments of tourism, urbanisation, commercialism, and packaged entertainment;
- cynicism within the solo dance situation and its senseless competitiveness.

There are also more serious questions. Why have classical Indian dances become insular and unresponsive to the dramatic social, historical, scientific, human changes that have occurred in the world around us over the past thirty years? What blocks and complexes prevent classical dancers from initiating basic changes? What makes them resistant to contemporary progressive social values? Why is it that even purely formal exercises and experiments have eluded these forms? Why have no attempts been encouraged to explore the power and strength of these forms? For example, their links with martial arts?

At the same time, the criteria, the parameters, the references, the directions for what constitutes 'new' and 'contemporary' in the realm of classical dance is a sensitive area and there can be no easy formulae and solutions. I believe one can make only one small step at a time with feeling and sincerity. One does feel the lack, though, of serious and integrated intellectual inputs. If Bharata, Abhinavagupta and Nandikeshwara once enunciated radical and loaded concepts for human self-renewal, the question arises: What kind of scholarship is available to us today?

The principles of wholeness and relatedness that form the core of traditional thought are most relevant for us today. Through these we get some idea of the directions for a fresh search—questions of perceptual and creative levels, exchange and transmission, movement and control, art and experience, tradition and modernity, inner and outer, space and time, individual and collective, integrity and rupture, quantity and quality. These questions need to be confronted to help energise the classical dance scene.

I have explored the classical Bharatanatyam form to attempt a set of primary references based on which a progressive series of departures could be made. Though dance has been a fundamental passion with me, the performing situation never created an area of relevance for me. While being nourished by dance, I sought relevance outside the dance situation in other art forms as well as through integrating these. I relate to dance not as a performer but as one who explores through it deeply-felt experiences of life. These constitute layer upon layer of social accretions which retain dynamic power.

In a group production called *Devadasi*, I ventured out of the comfort and security of the traditional framework for the first time. Rejecting religious *sahitya*, I composed and choreographed this dance on the contemporary history of Bharatanatyam through its manifestation in the temple, court and modern stage; the social status of the dance and the *devadasi* dancers; its ostracism from orthodox South Indian society; its resurgence, riding the crest of the nationalist movement and its present decorative status. The dance concludes on a note of joy, vigour and buoyancy of spirit represented by a futuristic composition.

Even this primary exploration was intoxicating and I could no longer return to the irrelevance of the solo dance situation. Away from it, I began to see dance all afresh from a sociological perspective—saw its martial origins, its regionality, its direct link with human social practices as against idealistic notions of divine origin. I could also understand the pulls and pressures on modern Bharatanatyam, now the cultural vehicle of an elite section of the community.

*Navagraha* was another effort to interact with the conservatism of the classical dance world. Very deliberately, I pursued an inter-disciplinary approach involving leading vocalists, instrumentalists, graphic designers and film makers. I explored, to the full, abstract notions of time and space, subject and object, stillness and movement, centre and cosmos, besides integrating dynamic principles of dance with graphic and colour symbology, iconography and astronomy and the male-female social relationship. It represented a need to go back to the basics.

Other exploratory dances I have composed and choreographed, not really for performing but for generating dialogue, convince me that the conceptual foundations upon which our classical dances have been organised are tremendously rich and powerful and charged and, in fact, have worked out aspects of the form, the body, the stage and presentation which are quite contemporary and avant-garde in their sweep. The amount of inspiration the contemporary dance and theatre movements of the West have taken from these are an indication of their formal richness and contemporaneity. The tragedy is that our performing scene today does not quite live up to these concepts, most of the time being even oblivious of the energy and power that these contain.

What is needed today is for classical dancers to probe deeper into their art with an open mind—not necessarily immediately in terms of large audiences but, first of all, in order to come to terms with the unexplored wealth of the form itself. For this, of course, they will need as much intellectual rigour, sensuality and broad humanism as a Bharata or an Abhinavagupta.

## The Other Side

B. Malchow-Tayebi

The East-West Dance Encounter, like the previous Encounters, was planned to provide a platform for a meeting of different styles, forms and theories of dance and their inter-cultural exchange.

But this time things were different. What really took place was meeting of extraordinary human beings and artists, communicating with each other beyond the borders of culture, society and traditions. Confrontation and companionship were not determined by forms and techniques of their different dance styles, but by the differing motivations and driving forces behind the creative process.

Sure enough, traditions in the East and West, the question of choreography, style, technique, music and stage were discussed at length during the closed sessions. But the moments when the artists and audience in the Little Theatre were moved to tears or carried away by joy came when artists like Susanne Linke, Chandralekha, Kumudini and many others revealed the roots of art and existence with incredible depth and truthfulness.

Suddenly, all the masks that each one of us wears all the time and all the roles which we play vanished. We were aware of a heart and a soul and a being that we all share. Vulnerability and anxiety, uncertainty and failure no longer remained feelings to be hidden. Honesty, compassion and love no longer seemed to be an impossible dream. Our longing for life in our lives became word. Art unveiled that it is nothing else but the real life that we are struggling so desperately to deny.

This collection of some of the statements made during the daily sessions attempts to preserve at least some memories of these glowing moments of a human encounter.

. . .

## Who Are You?

*I am an experimenter. I do as I feel:* Mrinalini Sarabhai.

*I am a radical optimist:* Chandralekha.

*I don't hold a flag. I want to use my hand:* Kumudini Lakhia.

*I am just a dancer who wants to keep on dancing upto the last day of her life:* Ritha Devi.

*I like very much to go into the corner:* Gerhard Bohner.

*I am an Italian crazy:* Patrizia Cerroni.



*It is always I, me—you have to get out of yourself* Kumudini Lakhia.  
(Photo: Palasranjan Bhaumick)



*Why have I been born into this world, ask this question first:* Yamini Krishnamurti  
(Photo: Pankaj Shah)

## Attitudes Towards Life

*Our brain works very well and people speak about everything, but we have to sweat for the experience:* Susanne Linke.

*To get something of value, it has to do with pain:* Susanne Linke.

*Lots and lots of failure-stories have to be told:* Chandralekha.

*Life is too short to play around and see what will happen:* Susanne Linke

*We have to speak the language of truth:* Chandralekha

*The only thing in life we cannot be tolerant of is if somebody is not honest:* Susanne Linke.

*You can crack up, but you have to know what you are really doing:* Gerhard Bohner

*If somebody has to say something that is inside of him and that is true, the form is not so important. It comes through:* Sharon Lowen.

## Why Are You Dancing?

*I have to do it and whether you like it or not, I don't bother:* Carmen DeLavallade.

*Dance meant for me to remain a little more human, a little less brutal:* Chandralekha.

*As you are creating and performing your art, you keep alive.* Anne-Marie Gaston.





*For me any classical dance is a language and the limits you set to it, are the limits of your own mind:* Mallika Sarabhai. (Photo: Palasranjan Bhaumick)

*Everything in music and drama comes out of the guts.* Carmen DeLavallade.

*At the end you forget about the music and what remains is the pure feeling:* Sonal Mansingh.

*Emotions speak and that is what dance is all about.* Carmen DeLavallade.

*With lack of emotional support, my dance grew cold:* Sonal Mansingh.

*It is our daily work to polish our insight by improving our dance:* Susanne Linke.

*You have to find the aroma for what you are going to say, and it's not easy, because there is an awful lot of space here. You can pick from the whole universe:* Carmen DeLavallade.

## Why Are You Dancing?



*What I am trying to show in dance is the soul:* Susanne Linke.  
(Photo: Palasranjan Bhaumick)

*I want to create pools of light:* Sonal Mansingh.

*We are here to give something to the Supreme:* Igor Wakhévitch

## Some Aspects Of Your Work

*The idea of a woman that has something to do with material; it is soft, it gives in, and it is beautiful when it falls:* Susanne Linke.

*A woman living in limbo, coming back every night to relive the precious moments of her life:* Carmen DeLavallade.

*A woman's life is over, a whole life is over, an earthshaking event and nobody speaks about it. Can we poetisize it?:* Chandralekha.

*I came to a stage in my life when I wanted a divorce from Krishna:* Kumudini Lakhia.

*I have not experimented yet — in personal life, yes — but not in my art:* Sonal Mansingh.

*I felt a little bit bored after doing the clown for such a long time:* Dominique Bagouet.

*It is just a little sad; sitting on the toilet and being bored. On the stage it had to be somewhat more poetic.* Susanne Linke.

*A little feeling, that something is wrong with your life; but we never get out.* Susanne Linke.

#### East-West Encounter

*When I come to the West, especially to Germany, and I see the people walk, I feel that they have forgotten to walk. When I see them stand, I feel they have forgotten to stand. Then I realise how rich we are.* Chandralekha.

*After having been to India, you never go back the same person. The most beautiful and the ugliest, India can give it.* Susanne Linke.

*What is this burden of choreography? There is dance in every movement!* Chandralekha.

*Editing, cutting short is a language of numbers, not of dance.* Chandralekha.

*Western dancers: people with beautiful bodies and their legs sticking out. At my age I don't have to put my leg up here, I have done that already!* Carmen DeLavallade.

*Cunningham can really complicate things so well, that you think you become very bright!* Patrizia Cerroni.

*Dance is not language, it is movement.* Kumudini Lakhia.

*East and West are only geographical, but we are all the same.* Susanne Linke.

*You wanted to have a solution at the end of the week. It will never come, because then life ends.* Susanne Linke.



*Centering, more than structuring as for the Western people, is important for us.* Chandralekha.  
(Photo: Dashrath Patel)



*People who sit at the desk, they don't know what the experience was this week.* Susanne Linke  
(Photo: Palasranjan Bhaumick)



## Bala

Balasaraswati, the great Bharata Natyam dancer, died in Madras on February 9, 1984. She was born on May 13, 1918 in a family whose contribution to dance and music has flowed in a continuous stream for at least 250 years, beginning with Papammal who was a musician and dancer at the Tanjavur court in the eighteenth century. Papammal's granddaughter, Kamakshi, was taught by the great Ganapati Shastri and Kamakshi's daughter, Sundarammal, was the pupil of Subbaraya Shastri, the son of Shyama Shastri. The family thus became the repository of their remarkable compositions. Sundarammal's daughter, Veena Dhanam, regarded as the finest exponent of this instrument, was Balasaraswati's grandmother. Jayamma, Balasaraswati's mother, was herself a distinguished musician. Besides, almost all the members of the household practised dancing. Here was a family blessed consistently over several generations with the twin gifts of dance and music.

Balasaraswati's teacher, Kandappan, was the inheritor of a great tradition of *nattuvanar-s*. He was the great-grandson of Chinnayya, the eldest of the Tanjore Quartet.

Steeped in such a rich background, it is no surprise that Balasaraswati's *arangetram* (at Kancheepuram) took place when she was only seven and was attended by some of the greatest musicians and dance connoisseurs of the time. Under the stern tutelage of Kandappan, Balasaraswati blossomed into an accomplished dancer when she was still in her teens. Her eloquent gestures, her moving *abhinaya*, her beautiful sense of timing transformed her recital into a near-miracle, creating a deep and lasting impact on audiences both in India and abroad. Dancers of the calibre of Martha Graham, Merce Cunningham, Ted Shawn came under her spell. Drawing on a repertoire of nearly 15 *varnam-s*, over a hundred *javalis* and *padam-s* and with the added mastery over music, she made each of her performances a memorable experience.

As early as 1955, Balasaraswati received from the Sangeet Natak Akademi its National Award for Dance. The President of India honoured her with the title of Padma Vibhushan; the Rabindra Bharati with a doctorate. In 1973, the Music Academy, Madras, conferred on her the title of *Sangeeta Kalanidhi*. (She is the only dancer to be so honoured.) The National Centre for the Performing Arts and the Government of Tamil Nadu produced a documentary on her art, directed by Satyajit Ray. It affords a glimpse into her genius, into some facets of her personality, and into her total and uncompromising involvement with the music and dance of the composition she was presenting. It remains a brief record of Balasaraswati, who was a legend even in her own lifetime.

. . . .

We reproduce here brief excerpts from the articles of Narayana Menon and Satyajit Ray revealing Balasaraswati's artistry.

—Editor

"Balasaraswati's art has to be evaluated against the background of the Karnatic tradition. Her *padam*-s were as inseparable from the Karnatic tradition as Jayamma's Sahana or Saveri. The one seemed to grow from the other. It was, as it were, abstract music being given concrete shape. Balasaraswati's *bhava* was not merely the enactment of the words of a song. It was the recreation in another medium of the musical subtleties of a song."

—Narayana Menon

"As we drove to Bala's house on the morning after our arrival, I felt a twinge of regret at having missed her in her prime. I consoled myself with the thought that Bala filmed at fifty-eight was better than Bala not being filmed at all.

"The regal presence that confronted us as we crossed the threshold of her house took my breath away. Bala had lost weight—due to diabetes, I'd been told—but had lost none of her poise and vitality. Face to face with her, I felt a fresh surge of enthusiasm for the film...

"It was Bala herself who chose the *varnam* 'Mohamana' for her second and final item in the film. I knew Bala could spin out a *varnam* for over an hour and hold a discerning audience spellbound for its whole length. I also knew that she had been rehearsing her piece for the film at home. I asked Lakshmi how long this particular version of the *varnam* would run. She said, "Mother has whittled it down to twelve minutes. She says she can't make it any shorter". I was anxious that the dance should go into a single reel, as otherwise it would involve a change-over in the projection, causing an inevitable jerk in the music. I should have been happier had the dance been a trifle shorter. At one point I even thought of pointing out to Bala that the exigencies of the 78 rpm gramophone record had at one time obliged even our most eminent classical musicians to perform 3-minute *khayal*-s, complete with *alap*, *vilambit* and *drut*. But in the end I decided to let Bala have her way, only pointing out that since the film in the camera had to be replenished every five minutes, she would have to do her dance in three parts. As it turned out, Bala had already decided to do it piecemeal, and had split it up into a dozen or so units. This was not out of consideration for the camera, but to ensure perfection in her performance. This striving for perfection, as I learned later, was instilled in her early in her career by her mother. 'Remember', she had said, 'there will always be at least one crazy person in the audience who will know all the time exactly what you are doing'.

"In filming the *varnam*, I had the extraordinary experience of turning into a bemused spectator, wholly at the mercy of the performer, but happy in the thought that what the camera was recording was Bala at her resplendent best."

—Satyajit Ray

We can offer no better tribute to Balasaraswati than to ponder over her concept of Bharata Natyam as expressed in her own words. The following excerpts are from the three articles by Balasaraswati published in the Quarterly Journal of the National Centre for the Performing Arts.

—Editor

"To create the most perfect realization of *rasa* in a performance, all elements must be in balance. Although *tala* provides a wonderfully strong backbone, it is undoubtedly *raga-bhava* which evokes this *rasa* in all its varying shades and infinite variety. The rhythmic forms and its mould should be such as to augment the *raga-bhava*. The more the *raga-bhava*, the more does the *abhinaya* shine. We should never forget that in deriving *bhava-raga-tala* from the syllables of the word *Bha-ra-ta*, there is an underlying concept of the equality of these three elements. In the nuances in the *abhinaya*, the *raga-bhava* stands beautifully integrated, and includes the subtle expression of *gamaka*-s, the intonation of *shruti*, and the unfolding of improvisation in *niraval*... The masters have created separately compositions especially suited for the dance. The hundreds of songs useful for music-concerts are of a different kind. Apart from these, the masters had separated the dance-music; we should inquire into their idea in doing so. Their main ideas are: (1) the *raga* and *tala* should stand inter-twined. (2) the *raga* and *bhava* should go hand in hand in *abhinaya*. (3) the *raga* and the words of the song should mingle together in the *abhinaya*... Songs suited to concert-singing afford no scope for the full creative unfolding of *abhinaya*. This is my experience. *Pada*-s and *pada-varna*-s are indeed the jewels of dance-music. The *Bhairavi tana-varna* is the treasure of concert-music. The masters of dance have so set their creations that the sequences involving strenuous physical movements alternate with relaxed passages of *abhinaya*. Similarly between the *pada-varna* and the *tillana*, they placed *pada*-s for quiet *abhinaya*. *Natya-rasika*-s may see this arrangement of fast and slow tempos alternating, affording a quickening and relaxation following each other. The students of dance who are to come up in the future should acquire an equal mastery of the twin arts of music and dance, understand the subtle aspects of both and abide by the underlying principles of the art as it had been developed by our ancestors over the centuries."

"It is the stream of *shringara* that swells into the mighty river of the lover-beloved songs of the Vaishnava and Shaiva Saints, the *ashtapadi*-s of Jayadeva and the compositions of Kshetragna. In Bharata Natyam, too, when it comes to *abhinaya*, *shringara* has been the dominant mood... The *shringara* we experience in Bharata Natyam is never carnal; never, never. For those who have yielded themselves to its discipline with total dedication, dance like music is the practice of the Presence; it cannot be merely the body's rapture.

"Bharata Natyam is an art which consecrates the body which is considered to be in itself of no value. The *yogi* by controlling his breath and by modifying his body acquires the halo of sanctity. Even so, the dancer, who dissolves her identity in rhythm and music, makes her body an instrument, at least for the duration of the dance, for the experience and expression of the spirit.

"I believe that the traditional order of the Bharata Natyam recital viz., *alarippu*, *jatiswaram*, *shabdham*, *varnam*, *padam*-s, *tillana* and the *shloka* is the correct sequence in the practice of this art, which is an artistic *yoga*, for revealing the spiritual through the corporeal.

"The greatness of this traditional concert-pattern will be apparent even from a purely aesthetic point of view. In the beginning, *alarippu*, which is based on rhythm alone, brings out the special charm of pure dance. The movements of *alarippu* relax the dancer's body and thereby her mind, loosen and coordinate her limbs and prepare her for the dance. Rhythm has a rare capacity to concentrate. *Alarippu* is most valuable in freeing the dancer from distraction and making her single-minded.

"The joy of pure rhythm in *alarippu* is followed by *jatiswaram* where there is the added joy of melody. Melody, without word or syllable, has a special power to unite us with our being. In *jatiswaram*, melody and movement come together. Then comes the *shabdham*. It is here that compositions, with words and meanings, which enable the expression of the myriad moods of Bharata Natyam are introduced.

"The Bharata Natyam recital is structured like a Great Temple: we enter through the *gopuram* (outer hall) of *alarippu*, cross the *ardhamandapam* (half-way hall) of *jatiswaram*, then the *mandapa* (great hall) of *shabdham*, and enter the holy precinct of the deity in the *varnam*. This is the place, the space, which gives the dancer expansive scope to revel in the rhythm, moods and music of the dance. The *varnam* is the continuum which gives ever-expanding room to the dancer to delight in her self-fulfilment, by providing the fullest scope to her own creativity as well as to the tradition of the art.

"The *padam*-s now follow. In dancing to the *padam*-s, one experiences the containment, cool and quiet, of entering the sanctum from its external precinct. The expanse and brilliance of the outer corridors disappear in the dark inner sanctum; and rhythmic virtuosity of the *varnam* yield to the soul-stirring music and *abhinaya* of the *padam*. Dancing to the *padam* is akin to the juncture when the cascading lights of worship are withdrawn and the drum beats die down to the simple and solemn chanting of sacred verses in the closeness of God. Then, the *tillana* breaks into movement like the final burning of camphor accompanied by a measure of din and bustle. In conclusion, the devotee takes to his heart the god he has so far glorified outside; and the dancer completes the traditional order by dancing to a simple devotional verse.

"At first, mere metre; then, melody and metre; continuing with music, meaning and metre; its expansion in the centrepiece of the *varnam*; thereafter, music and meaning without metre; in variation of this, melody and metre; in contrast to the pure rhythmical beginning, a non-metrical song at the end. We see a most wonderful completeness and symmetry in this art. Surely the traditional votaries of our music and dance would not wish us to take any liberties with this sequence?

"The greatest blessing of Bharata Natyam is its ability to control the mind. Most of us are incapable of single-minded contemplation even when actions are abandoned. On the other hand, in Bharata Natyam actions are not avoided; there

is much to do but it is the harmony of various actions that results in the concentration we seek. The burden of action is forgotten in the pleasant charm of the art. The feet keeping to time, hands expressing gesture, the eye following the hand with expression, the ear listening to the dance master's music, and the dancer's own singing—by harmonising these five elements the mind achieves concentration and attains clarity in the very richness of participation. The inner feeling of the dancer is the sixth sense which harnesses these five mental and mechanical elements to create the experience and enjoyment of beauty. It is the spark which gives the dancer her sense of spiritual freedom in the midst of the constraints and discipline of the dance. The *yogi* achieves serenity through concentration that comes from discipline. The dancer brings together her feet, hands, eyes, ears and singing into a fusion which transforms the serenity of the *yogi* into a torrent of beauty. The spectator, who is absorbed in intently watching this, has his mind freed of distractions and feels a great sense of clarity. In their shared involvement, the dancer and the spectator are both released from the weight of worldly life, and experience the divine joy of the art with a sense of total freedom."

. . .

"Another notable feature of Bharata Natya is that the songs are vocally rendered by the artiste and the background musician. It is not dancing just to the tune of instrumental music, but dancing to the words set to music. Yet it is not just dancing to the words in their superficial meaning alone, nor is the music detached from the words and their full (inner and outer) meaning. My point is that the songs must be vocally rendered by the danseuse herself while she dances. Since she cannot do the singing with gusto because of the physical exertion of dancing, a background musician sings with her, and usually her dance master himself renders the drum syllables. Yes, these drum syllables must also be vocally rendered, even when they are not set to music as in the opening piece, *alarippu*.

"The artiste has to bring out through gesture not only the outer meaning of the words of the songs, but has also to interpret all their implications and inner meanings, sometimes even building up episodes around a single line. But all through this she must not change the actual words of the song that she is vocally rendering. Yes, even while she is enacting, in gestures, monologues and dialogues that are far removed from the actual words of the song, she must not utter the words fit for those situations, but only repeat the same actual words of the lyrical text. That is, whereas she is bodily, facially and figuratively gesturing myriad changing moods and environments, she vocally adheres to the same unchanging phrases in the text. One more interesting feature here is that, though the words are the same, she makes endless variations (of sound or *abhinaya*) called *sangati*-s in the music set for the words, variations which help to bring out the many shades of the inner meaning of the text. It is only when the artiste is a true musician and enters into the spirit of the song through music that she can interpret in gesture the song to perfection by simply keeping the movement of her hands and eyes in consonance with the ups and downs, curves and glides.

pauses and frills in the music, irrespective of the actual words of the song but in keeping with the dialogue woven in gesture around them. This is justified by quoting the dance-scripts which, of course, admit *vachikabhinaya*. But I sincerely feel that *vachikabhinaya* belongs to drama and dance-drama and not to dancing sui generis. For I consider that this feat of achieving perfection simultaneously in the variation (in gesture and music) and non-variation (in the sung word) helps greatly in achieving strength and clarity of mind—which again is an important factor in Yoga. Another remarkable aspect of Bharata Natya is the great scope it affords to the artiste's imagination especially in the *abhinaya*. She can improvise ad infinitum moods and situations to bring out the full content of the song. Even in the *Nritta* part of the rhythmic foot-work, where the unity of music prevents her from taking too much liberty, she can to some extent express her native imagination in improvisation. As for the gestural part of *abhinaya*, her wings can soar to the very skies of freedom.

"Another noteworthy feature of Bharata Natya is the quality of the gestures. These gestures must never be taken to be the gestures used in everyday life or in drama and cinema acting. *Abhinaya* is as far from acting as poetry is from prose. No feeling, no emotion, no mood, no experience, no locale is gestured in a realistic, matter-of-fact way. They are all expressed in the suggestive language of the imagination. Forceful contortions and violent movements are out of place in Bharata Natya. Yet it does not just portray the soft side of life. The deepest and weightiest subjects are conveyed by suggestion in a more striking manner than through direct stage-acting. Dignified restraint is the hall-mark of *abhinaya*. Even in the best of laughter, there is a restraint on the mouth movement, even at the height of wonder, there is a limit for opening the eyes; even in the white-heat of amorous sport, the danseuse has no use for movements of the torso but gestures only through the face and hands. It is this decency, decorum and dignity that imparts to Bharata Natya its divine character.

"The *hasta*-s or hand gestures may be said to be the alphabet of the suggestive language of Bharata Natya. Many of these *mudra*-s are common to both the *Tantra-Shastra*-s and Bharata Natya. *Tantra Shastra* is an arduous ordeal of religious disciplines meant to divinise the physical body in various ways, and here the *mudra*-s play an important part. The very fact that these same *mudra*-s occur in dancing alone bears testimony to the religious character of Bharata Natya. How these *mudra*-s acquire new meanings artistically in Bharata Natya is a subject which deserves study. Suffice it, if I point out a single example. The *mudra* of joining the tips of the thumb and the fore-finger is called *Chin-mudra* in the religious scriptures, meaning the 'Sign of Wisdom'. It is the Wisdom of realising the one-ness of the individual soul (signified by the fore-finger) with the One Over-Soul (signified by the thumb). Now, the *Chin-mudra* is accepted in this scriptural sense in dancing also. But see what new meaning it acquires in addition. It is the 'Sign of Wisdom' only when the palm is held in a graceful slant. The same *mudra* when the palm is held stiffly upright depicts the valour of the bowman who holds the arrow between the two fingertips. When, with the palm's back to the audience's view, the danseuse touches the mid-point of her eye-brows with this *mudra*, it conveys her putting on the mark of beauty, the *tilak*. So the same *mudra* stands for three such entirely different concepts as spiritual wisdom, valour, and preparation for meeting her lover.

"Bharata Natya gestures eliminate all the inessentials and depict concepts and objects strikingly by creating minimal semblance to the originals mainly by virtue of the *mudra*-s. For example, in the other dancing systems, including the Indian systems other than Bharata Natya, an elephant is gesturally depicted only with a fund of details like its high and bulky size, pillar-like legs, winnow-like ears, resilient trunk with its different movements, majestic gait etc. But see, how with the simple *mudra* of the four fingers—the stiffly bent first and fore-fingers signifying the tusks and the drooping middle two fingers denoting the trunk—the elephant is unmistakably suggested in Bharata Natya. Similarly a cow has to be gesturally presented in the other systems rather laboriously. But in Bharata Natya those same two fingers which stood for the elephant's tusks become the horns of the cow when tilted up perpendicularly, and the other three fingertips joined together picturize the face of the cow, and with a wave of the right hand the danseuse also represents the cowherd who drives it."





Mahadevi Varma presenting the Kalidas Samman to Rukminidevi.

Rukminidevi Arundale, founder of KALAKSHETRA, was awarded the Kalidas Samman for 1983-84 for her singular contribution to Indian dance. This prestigious national award for the creative arts has been instituted by the Government of Madhya Pradesh. A seven-member jury unanimously acclaimed the lead that Rukminidevi Arundale has given in re-interpreting our heritage, ranging from the classics to the folk and popular forms, and described it as a forerunner of the contemporary search for roots.

The famous Hindi poetess Mahadevi Varma presented the rupees one lakh Samman and a plaque of honour to Rukminidevi in a simple and dignified ceremony held on February 13, 1984 at Bharat Bhavan, the multi-arts complex in Bhopal.

## Book Reviews

TANJAVUR NRITYA PRABANDHA by Parvatikumar, Maharashtra Rajya Sahitya Sanskriti Mandal, Bombay, 1982, Rs. 165.00 (*In Marathi*).

Acharya Parvatikumar's name has become synonymous with the revival of the lost tradition of Marathi compositions by Maharaja Sarfoji II of Tanjavur (1798-1832). His untiring efforts in researching these compositions (in the Saraswati Mahal Library at Tanjavur), setting them to *raga*-s and *tala*-s and choreographing them in Bharata Natyam constitute a creative and lasting contribution in the field of classical dance. He has worked assiduously for several years on these compositions and presented them through his student Sucheta Bhide. What is remarkable is the deep thought devoted to the numbers choreographed by Parvatikumar and notated so painstakingly by him for students of dance. He has received assistance in music from Janardana Appaswami Pillai whose knowledge of the Carnatic and Hindustani music traditions has been of immense help in this major project.

Parvatikumar's interest in the compositions of Maharaja Sarfoji II was kindled when he read his *Korvyache Sahityache Jinas* in the Saraswati Mahal Library at Tanjavur. The *Nirupana*-s in the work mention various *tala*-s and *raga*-s but each *Nirupana* is set to one particular *raga* and *tala*. There is only one story, from beginning to end. The songs are in Marathi and speak of the advice given by the *sakhi* to the *nayika* in various situations involving the *nayaka*.

Several items of interest are to be found in the writings of Maharaja Sarfoji II. They include not merely items in the contemporary Bharata Natyam repertoire but also rare items like *Gita*, *Prabandha*, *Tripata*, *Jakkini*, *Matruka*, *Daru* etc. There is a popular belief that the famous Tanjore Quartet (Chinnaiya, Ponnaiya, Shivananda and Vadivelu, to whom the present-day Bharata Natyam repertoire is credited) adorned the court of Maharaja Sarfoji II and that there existed a repertoire of rare items which, in the course of time, was lost. However, Parvatikumar has attempted to reconstruct some of them with great diligence and imagination. He has explained in great detail items like *Jaya Jaya* (similar to *Todayamangalam*) which is an invocation. *Sharanu Sharanu*, the item recited after *Jaya Jaya*, seeks protection at the feet of the Lord. *Alaru* is similar to the *Alarippu* of Bharata Natyam. *Shollu* is a Tamil word, meaning mnemonics or *Bol*. Later on, this became *Jatiswaram* — when only the *solla* were sung and not the mnemonics. *Jakkini* is explained as a rare item with mnemonics like *Yallila yallalale*, with a touch of folk. In Sarfoji's composition, the story element is the same as in the *Nirupana*.

*Prabandha*, in Sarfoji's composition, has the following characteristics. In the beginning there is text along with the *svara*. Then follows *svara* with *pata* which has the mnemonic syllables of the *mridanga*. Later on, there are phrases like *dig dig dug dug* and *ten ten* etc. Thus, there is *nritya* and at times *abhinaya* depending on the text. *Tripata* is a part of the *Prabandha*. *Shlokavarna* is similar to *shloka* as in Bharata Natyam. *Kautam*-s (formerly presented in the temples) are in praise of the gods and use mnemonic syllables. *Mangale*, the final item, is in the nature of a benediction.

Parvatikumar has given the notation of *Kumarasambhavanirupana* set to *raga* Bilahari in *Adi tala*. The aforesaid items are all found in this *Nirupana*. In another *Nirupana* (*Sakhine nayakis buddhivada sangnyachi kalpita katha*) set to *raga* Pantuvarali in *Surfakta tala*, the same scheme is followed. The dance notations are explained succinctly and a student can understand them after careful study. However, as Parvatikumar has cautioned, there is no substitute for the personal guidance of the guru. The position of the feet, the hands, the head, the eyes, the neck, the hand gestures, are recorded in conformity with the *Natyashastra* treatises. The classification of the *nayika*-s is necessary for an understanding of the text and *abhinaya*. The *abhinayapada* for the *Umamaheshwaraparinaya* and *Parvatiakhya* *Nirupana* delineate various emotional situations which are explained with appropriate notes for *abhinaya*.

The labour expended in preparing and presenting these notations in minute detail is quite amazing. Students of dance owe a debt of gratitude to Parvatikumar for this outstanding work. Precision and thoroughness are the hallmark of his style. His deep knowledge and ability to communicate in writing are proof of his authority as a guru of integrity and perseverance.

The illustrations of the *hasta*-s, the *padabheda*-s and the *sthanakabheda*-s are depicted with clarity by Sucheta Bhide. The photographs of the Maratha rulers are of documentary value and the manuscript illustration from *Korvyache Sahityache Jinas* gives us an idea of the technical details of the songs written for dance. The size of the book is unwieldy and probably so because it suits the purposes of notation.

—SUNIL KOTHARI

BHAVAI AND ITS TYPICAL AHARYA by Goverdhan Panchal. Darpana Monograph Series, Darpana Academy of the Performing Arts, Ahmedabad, 1983. Price not stated (In English).

*Bhavai*, the traditional dramatic form that had emerged as a popular response to the traumatic experience of medieval Gujarat, is a living witness to the process by which the indigenous ethos of Gujarat, at its grass roots, met the challenge of a dominant Islamic culture and through a selective assimilation of some of its features enriched its own culture. *Bhavai* is one of those few surviving medieval forms which has attracted the attention of enlightened reformers, educators and literary men since the beginning of this century. While condemning the degenerate state of *Bhavai* in his days, Poet Dalpatram recognises its deep-rooted popularity by describing his play *Mithyabhimani* as a "*Bhavai* without a *Bhungal*." During the last two decades or so, many students of theatre, both from and outside Gujarat, have started taking a serious interest in this form. Dr. Sudha Desai, under the sensitive and perceptive guidance of Prof. Rasiklal C. Parikh, has explored various facets of *Bhavai* and attempted to trace its links with the ancient Indian *Uparupaka*-s. The publication of her comprehensive doctoral thesis has raised the level of research in this field.

To the growing corpus of literature on *Bhavai*, the first monograph of the Darpana series is a welcome addition. The simple but sophisticated elegance of its design and the competent production (with a minimum of printing errors) by VIKSAT deserves special mention—and so does the use of the term *Aharya* in its title.

Ancient Indian theatre was the actor's theatre in contrast to our modern theatre in which the director predominates. Technical terms emerging out of this tradition have a connotation different from their modern equivalents and the underlying concept often gets distorted in translation. For example, *Abhinaya*, in the ancient context, does not mean just acting. It covers everything that an actor does and uses to convey the meaning of the play to the audience. Unlike the modern theatre convention, it includes his makeup, costume, hand props, stage props etc. by grouping them under *Aharya Abhinaya*. Popularising these terms through regular usage has become all the more relevant when our modern theatre is trying to establish its identity. In attempting to do so, it seeks to understand the philosophical base of the Indian aesthetic concept of *Rasa* and to evolve a comprehensive approach in the direction of 'Total Theatre'.

However, it is not enough just to familiarise the modern theatre workers with these terms. They must be made aware of the basic source and the determining factor which has given this tradition its own identity. It is unfortunate that the author, inspite of his long association with the *Aharya* aspects of the modern Indian theatre and his conscientious efforts to study the ancient Indian theatre conventions, does not give adequate attention to the *Rasa*-orientation of *Bhavai*, which is after all the most crucial element that it shares with the ancient Indian tradition and which has moulded its form as well as content. Even the colour symbolism which is intrinsically linked with *Rasa* is referred to in the context of differentiating the divine characters from the human.

Perhaps, it would have been more helpful to the readers if the purpose of this monograph had been more clearly defined. Is it addressed to those serious theatre workers who are actively engaged in the revitalisation of *Bhavai* and are using it as a source of inspiration in their attempt to make modern Indian theatre more relevant and meaningful to their audiences? Or, is it addressed to those Gujarati as well as non-Gujarati theatre scholars who need more factual information about the practical aspects of this form? While both the categories of readers would like to understand the historical background of the various aspects of the current performances of *Bhavai*, it is difficult to satisfy their needs by addressing them simultaneously. It would have been more rewarding for the readers if the presentation of the valuable information collected by the author had been different for each category.

Theatre scholars, for instance, would have preferred a greater elaboration of the basis on which all the dramatic forms have been classified into three categories. The assumption here seems to be that *Uparupaka*-s and *Nritta Bheda*-s were performed in the closed theatres. The third generation *Natya* forms, encompassing all the surviving traditional dramatic forms on the other hand, were performed in the open air. One would hesitate to accept this as one of the main bases of classification. As the legend associated with the origin of ancient Indian

theatre indicates, many dramatic forms must have come into existence long before the three types of theatres, described in the *Natyashastra*, were built. The basic elements of the process by which a rich variety of theatre forms have come into existence are still operative all over the world. When simpler forms give rise to more complex forms, the former do not necessarily disappear. They co-exist and continue to interact with each other. Sophistication is achieved at the expense of losing the flexibility of the dramatic structure. The ancient *Upapuraka*-s and the medieval *Nritta Bheda*-s were no exceptions. Depending on the convenience of their audiences, these two forms as well as the *Rupaka*-s were performed either in the open or indoors. There is a clear reference in the plays of Bhavabhuti, Harsha etc. to its open-air performance during a festival. The surviving *Rangashala* of Bhoja at Dharanagari near Ujjain has no roof and the playing area is the rectangle at the centre which would suggest all the characteristics of an open-air performance. Even surviving traditional forms are often performed indoors in urban theatres without any basic changes.

Besides, the impact of the theatre architecture on the *Aharya Abhinaya* in a *Rasa*-oriented tradition needs to be considered more carefully. While it influenced some theatre conventions like *Kaksha Vibhaga*, it also eliminated the need for building any special sets for different plays (as is done today) by providing a permanent setting for all kinds of performances, *Lokadharmi* as well as *Natyadharmi*. They used movable stage props as and when necessary, whether they were performing indoors or in the open. Other elements of the *Aharya Abhinaya* e.g. costumes, makeup, etc. are far more influenced by the basic temperament, mood and the social status of the character, actor's movement and available light than by theatre architecture.

What has changed is the character of the audience. From the very beginning of drama, the actors have tried to collect the costumes and props from their patrons. The *Natyashastra* describes in detail what the actors received from different members of the audience when they presented their first play. In this sense, they were not much different from our contemporary *Bhavai* players. Without denying a quantitative, or even a qualitative, difference in the degree of popular appeal between various dramatic forms, ancient, medieval or those that have survived to this day, it must be remembered that even the latter project feudal values and are more or less governed by feudal norms.

Active theatre workers with a modern sensibility, would perhaps expect from a monograph a brief introduction to the background of *Bhavai* on which consensus is readily available. Thus, from their point of view, omission of *Maddhi no vesha* in which the stage prop is carried by a player and the illustration of the costume of the player in the *Vesha* of *Ardhanarishvara* is unfortunate.

However, on the whole, the serious efforts made by the author and the publisher to achieve excellence deserve appreciation and encourage us to look forward to forthcoming publications in this series.

—SHANTA GANDHI

AYODHYAKANDA OF TOLPAVA KOOOTHU by K. L. Krishnankutty Pulavar. Sangeet Natak Akademi, New Delhi, 1983, Rs. 100/- (In Tamil).

The songs accompanying the performance of the Shadow Puppet Shows in Kerala are for the most part embedded in palm leaves known only to a few practitioners of *Tolpava Koothu* (leather puppet play). It is an art fostered in the border districts of Kerala in close proximity to Tamilnadu. So, it is not strange that *Tolpava Koothu* leans heavily on the *Kambar Ramayana* for its literary text. K. L. Krishnankutty Pulavar, one of the few traditional gurus of this rare art form, has rendered a good service by transcribing the text of *Ayodhyakandam* (the *Atalpattu* as it is called, that is the 'acting version' in the palm-leaf manuscript). The Sangeet Natak Akademi, no doubt, deserves to be congratulated for publishing the photostat version of this transcribed edition. But, one feels that the text would have been more useful had there been an attempt to study and analyse how far the *Atalpattu* differs from the *Kambar Ramayana*. Those departures will be important in so far as the text of the performance is concerned, the main interpolations and their sources, the improvisational additions and their significance etc. Proper foot-notes and explanations are absolutely essential in publications of this kind. More than that, a student of the performing arts would naturally like to understand how the text is correlated at various points with the actual manipulation of the puppets. These are some of the limitations of the book. Even so, Sree Pulavar is to be congratulated for his work on transcribing at least one portion of the *Atalpattu* which he is using for his *Tolpava Koothu*.

—G. SANKARA PILLAI

## Evening Performances during the Dance Encounter at the Tata Theatre

Susanne Linke—*It Swans, High Tide* and *Transformation*.

Yamini Krishnamurti and her students—*A Vedic Ballet*.

Sonal Mansingh—Odissi.

Astad Deboo—East-West Dance Forms.

Ileana Citaristi—Mayurbhanj Chhau.

Chitra Sundaram—Bharata Natyam.

Bharat Sharma—East-West Dance Forms.

Carmen DeLavallade—*Sarong Paramaribo, Sweet Bitter Love* and *The Creation*.

Sucheta Bhide—Bharata Natyam.

Mrinalini Sarabhai and the Darpana troupe—*Serbendra Bhupala Kuruvanni* and a contemporary item on suicide.

Uttara Asha Coorlawala—*Winds of Shiva*.

Patrizia Cerroni—Modern Dance.

Chandralekha and her troupe—*Surya* and *The Primal Energy*.

Gerhard Bohner—*Black and White*.

Andreine Bel—Kathak; East-West Dance Forms.

Anne-Marie Gaston (Anjali)—Odissi and Bharata Natyam.

Kumudini Lakhia and the Kadamba troupe—Traditional Kathak and *Atah Kim*.

Stephen Long—*An Introduction to Classical Ballet* and *Meditation*.

Ritha Devi—East-West Dance Forms.

Elizabeth Mauger—Modern Dance.

Dominique Bagouet—Extracts from *Grande Maison*.



Published by J. J. Bhabha for the National Centre for the Performing Arts, Bombay House, Bombay 400 023. Edited by Dr. Kumud Mehta and printed by M. N. Palwankar at the Tata Press Ltd., 414 Veer Savarkar Marg, Bombay 400 025.

Reg. No. 24073/73